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THE

DACOTAH SCOURGE;

OR,

THE WHITE ANTELOPE OF THE PAWNEES.

BY GEORGE W. ROBINSON.

NEW YORK:

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98 WILLIAM STREET.

THE

DAGOTAH SCOTCH

OR

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(No. 185.)

BY GEORGE F. ROBINSON

NEW YORK:

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25 NASSAU STREET.

THE DACOTAH SCOURGE.

CHAPTER I. THE FOREST FRIEND.

OUR story opens at a time when all the country west of the northern branches of the Mississippi was one vast wilderness. The wily savage held undisputed sway over its mighty forests and boundless glades. Game of every description abounded; it was a hunter's paradise.

Bold indeed was he who dared to enter far into this unexplored wilderness, for the chances were many that his scalp would hang in the wigwam of some Indian warrior as a trophy of his cunning over the detested pale-faces who were fast encroaching on the red-man's hunting-grounds. Among those who had penetrated the hostile region as far as the head-waters of the Osage river, were Dan Lee, an old trapper, and his son-in-law, Balt Walters, a young hunter of a bold and restless disposition, who loved the trackless forest for its very dangers.

Nature had been most bountiful in her gifts to Balt Walters, reared as he had been in the midst of scenes when the early pioneers had to fight almost constantly for the rough log-cabin that sheltered their little ones; and accustomed from childhood to the constant use of the rifle, his fatal aim was proverbial throughout the border.

Strong, hardy and robust, capable of enduring any amount of hardships, it was not to be wondered at that when he grew to manhood he stood unrivaled as a hunter and Indian-fighter. Adding all the cunning subtlety of the Indian to the knowledge of the pale-face, he was successful when others failed. He could imitate the call or cry of every inhabitant of the forest, from the yelping bark of the wolf to the tiny insect that chirped through the grass, powers that were of great value to him as a hunter, or when circumventing an enemy.

No decoy, however well planned or cunningly laid, ever deceived him. The very red-skins themselves acknowledged him as a most dangerous enemy.

Not a settler along the border but would have been proud to bestow one of their blooming daughters on Balt, and not one of the same border maidens would have said him nay for a husband.

Balt Walters loved Amy Lee, the old trapper's daughter, and oh! how fondly was that love returned. It was a joyful day to Dan Lee when he called Balt Walters by the endearing name of son.

Ten years of wedded life glided calmly and happily over the head of Balt and his lovely wife. Two children were born to them, the oldest a boy called after Amy's father, the other a girl who bore the name of her mother.

The tide of emigration began to flow westward. The settlements along the border more numerous and thickly peopled. Game became scarcer than in years past, when Balt could stand at his own cabin door and kill all that was sufficient for the support of his family.

Walters and his father-in-law began to get restless. They longed for the solitude of the vast forest where their ears would not be dinned by the sound of the settler's ax, as it was buried into the heart of some towering forest monarch—clearing the way for the march of civilization as it flowed toward the setting sun.

One evening as Balt and the old man sat at the cabin door enjoying the soothing influences of their pipes, the old trapper heaved a deep sigh that came from his heart, and slowly exclaimed, as if his words were intended for no ears but his own:

"Ah me! times is not as they used to was. These settlers are destroying the very face of nature, an' driving the varmints away whar an old man like me can't foller 'em. Ah me! I remember when I warn't so."

"You are right, father," replied Balt, in a sorrowful tone. "A feller nowadaye can't take a few hours' tramp to stretch his legs, but he's sure to stumble across some of their cus'd clearings. What with thar dogs, an' thar clearings, an' thar girdlings, an' ev'ry other devilment of the settlements, the deer

are near all driven away, an' what remain of 'em are so run down that thar flesh is only fit to feed one of your town-bred varmints who knows no more about a saddle of prime venison than he does of the differ atween a wolf an' a painter. Only for Amy an' the children I would up stakes an' away long ago."

"Then, dear Balt, say so no longer. Your Amy loves the grand old forest as well as either father or you; all places are the same to Amy Walters so long as she has her husband, children and father with her. I was born in the forest, and expect to die there," said the forest-wife whose loving look sent the blood bounding through the heart of the bold woodsman, as she laid a hand caressingly on his shoulder.

"Well said, gal!" shouted the old trapper, joyfully. "Balt an' I hev not tramped the country together 'thout knowing whar to pitch our camp, whar we're not likely to be disturbed by many visitors save the wild varmints."

Ere they retired for the night it was settled that before another week had passed they should begin their journey westward. A bright May morning, less, than a week after the above conversation, Balt Walters gathered together his wordly possessions, put them in a wagon, and with a light heart set out on his long journey westward.

The further they progressed west, game of all description became more abundant. The hearts of Balt and old Dan Lee felt lighter than they had for years. It was the beginning of June when they reached a rapid stream that emptied its waters into the Osage. Here Balt determined to settle. The two men set to work with a right good will, and in a short time had erected a stout, commodious log-cabin.

The forest and neighboring streams gave both hunters constant employment.

A year soon glided past, and during that period not a human being did they see. One day as Balt was returning home with part of a fat buck slung across his broad shoulders, he suddenly came upon an Indian warrior who was unable to move. At the sight of the white man the red-skin vainly endeavored to regain his feet, but the effort was too much for him. The hunter at once saw that the Indian had met with some accident, and hastened to inquire:

"My brother is hurt; why is he so far from the village of his people?"

The dark, fierce scowl on the red-skin's face at once vanished as he replied, in tolerable English:

"Santalanta was alone on the war-path of the treacherous Dacotahs; they were too many. An eagle may be wounded by the arrow of a squaw." The savage pointed to the head of an arrow sticking in his knee, which had caused the whole limb to swell to a frightful size.

"The cut-throat Assiniboina are cowardly dogs. The Great Spirit has given to Santalanta the head of a Pawnee Loup. The hunter of the pale-faces shall attend to his wound."

Balt at once set about extracting the arrow-head from the knee. Although this operation caused the Pawnee intense pain, not a sigh or groan escaped him. A few pounded herbs, well known to both for their healing qualities, soon assuaged the pain and inflammation of the wounded limb.

The kindness of the hunter was extended further. On his strong back he bore the red-man to his own cabin, where, for two weeks, he received all the care and attention of a brother until he was well.

CHAPTER II.

THE FOREST FIENDS.

ON the morning when Santalanta was about to set out for his home, on the far distant Pawnee Loup, the Indian chief took the hand of the hunter. Having rolled the sleeve of his hunting-shirt above his elbow, he began to tattoo the likeness of a wolf on the fleshy part of Walters' arm. The pricked parts he rubbed with a blue pigment until the Loupine figure was clearly defined.

"If my pale-face brother ever finds himself near the hunting-grounds of the Pawnees, and the sun does not shine upon his path, there is not a warrior of my nation but will

know the totem of the chief. Let my brother remember the words of Santalanta."

"The ears of the pale-face are not shut to the words of his Pawnee brother," responded the hunter. "In return, let the warrior take this rifle; it will clear his path if he should meet the cowardly Dacotahs. It has brought the death-shriek from many a skulking Shawnee, Miami and Mingo. Handle it keefer, chief—light lead, light powder, an' your wigwam shall never be in want of deer or buffalo."

The Pawnee received the rifle joyfully, for to him it was the greatest gift that could have been bestowed upon him.

The day after the departure of the Pawnee chief for his distant home, Balt Walters was startled by discovering footsteps around his cabin. Further examination brought him to the thicket where a savage had been hidden. His surprise was at once changed to alarm. On the ground lay the war-arrow of a Dacotah or Sioux. Balt knew that the presence of the red-skin boded ill. Without a word to frighten the inmates of his cabin, he set out on the trail. After following it for some distance it conducted him to a small grove. Around one of the trees the ground was trampled by the hoofs of a horse.

"I see it all now," said Balt, to himself. "The infernal imp left his horse here while he war skwinting around the cabin. He's off now, an' before long I'll have a pack of 'em howling an' screeching around the log. But, I think me an' the old man 'll give 'em such a warm welcome that they'll not trouble us again."

With a heavy heart Walters turned his footsteps homeward, and imparted to the old trapper what had happened. The old man shook his head.

"My son, the Dacotahs are the most treacherous imps that roam the prairies. We ken only do our best. You an' I hev fust too many of the brutes in our time to be scart now, an' I guess we ken do it ag'in."

During the remainder of the day Balt and the old man were engaged in putting the cabin in a state of defense to withstand any assault that might be made upon it. In several places holes were bored to allow the free use of their rifles.

The night and next day passed without any appearance of

an enemy. Shortly after night fell Balt went out to scout around for some signs. Mile after mile did he walk, but he saw nothing, and was on the point of returning when his practiced ear detected, out on the prairie, the steady footfall of several horses. Well Balt knew that each horse bore on its back a savage foe. Nearer and nearer they approached, until the well-trained eyes of the hunter made out twenty red horsemen.

Without delay Walters sped home to receive his unwelcome visitors.

Shortly after midnight the hunter discovered several dark objects approaching the front of the cabin, while the old trapper reported several others creeping from the rear. When within range the two rifles were discharged with fatal effect. The report of the weapons was answered by war-whoops, so terribly revengeful that the mother and daughter screamed with affright.

The savages, seeing that they were discovered, sprung to their feet and rushed against the door. Again the fatal rifles were discharged, to be answered by the death-shriek of two more of the red fiends.

The door being heavy and strong, resisted all the efforts to burst it in.

In one corner stood Amy Walters loading the rifles as fast as they were discharged, while young Dan handed them round when wanted. One half of the assailants were either dead or mortally wounded, and they were no nearer to their intended victims than when the attack began. It was clear that the door could not be forced; they must resort to some other mode of assault.

They retired out of range for consultation.

"What do ye think, Balt; will the bloody hounds make another attack?" asked the old trapper, with an anxious voice.

"I am sure they will, father; they have lost too many warriors to give up now. They have only hauled off to hatch some other devilish plan for our destruction."

"I believe you are right. All I'm afraid of is that they'll fire the log. If they do it'll go hard with us."

"If it comes to that," muttered Balt, with a quivering voice

and pallid countenance, "all we have to do^s is to rush out upon them and die like men."

Half an hour passed in silence, when, all at once, the air became illuminated with clouds of flaming arrows, discharged at the doomed cabin. There having been no rain for a long time, the building was dry as tinder. The bark and other light combustible material that formed the roof soon ignited and communicated the flames to the more solid timber.

The savage yells that followed the flight of the flaming arrows caused the manly form of Balt Walters to shake like a leaf in the summer air; tears of strong emotion coursed down his bronzed countenance. No selfish or cowardly fear thus affected him. The fate of the wife of his bosom and his little ones excited this emotion.

The Dacotahs, as they watched the flames, danced and shouted their wildest war-whoops, but, at the same time, took good care to keep out of the range of the rifles that had already proved fatal to so many of their braves.

It is impossible to describe the situation of the inmates of the log-cabin, more than twice a hundred miles from the nearest settlement.

Gradually the smoke and flames worked their way downward until it was almost impossible to breathe. Not a word of complaint escaped from the lips of the devoted wife of Balt Walters.

"Come, father," said Balt, with the calmness of desperation on his manly countenance, "let's make a rush upon the red devils. If we go under, we will have the satisfaction of all dying together."

With a hatchet in one hand and his rifle in the other, Balt sprung out, closely followed by his wife and children, while just behind them came the old trapper. They had hardly crossed the threshold of the burning cabin when they were surrounded by the sanguinary Dacotahs. The foremost in the attack received the bullet of Walters' rifle in his heart. Fighting against fearful odds, he saw the tomahawk of a savage buried in the brain of his wife. The old trapper fought with fury, but in vain; the last Balt saw of him was, a fiend-like-looking savage tearing the reeking scalp from his aged head.

Maddened by the sight, the might of a giant seemed to be thrown into his arm. Right and left his blows rained upon his savage foes. While bravely battling with two powerful Indians in front, another dealt him from behind a direful blow on the back of the head with a war-club. It stunned him for the instant, but, the next moment he bounded away with the speed of the wind, uttering such fearful shrieks and yells that even the very Dakotahs stood aghast. Not one of them attempted to follow him.

An hour later the place was tenanted only by the dead.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNTERS' CAMP.

ONE night, about two weeks after the events first related, a party of hunters sat round a roaring camp-fire in one of the prairie-bottoms of Western Missouri. The song and merry jest passed freely around, and many a wild adventure of personal danger was related.

"Come, Bonte, what's the matter?" asked a young hunter of one of the oldest of the party, a Canadian Frenchman of the name of Henri Bonte, whose appearance indicated the hardy borderman. "We have not heard one word from you to-night. Come, man, spin us an adventure to pass away the time."

"Wal, Alf, I've nothing to say ag'in' it, if all are willing."

A general response in the affirmative was the reply.

"Wal, boys, the story I'm a-going to tell ye may have turned out different to what it did, but such as it are, I'll gin it ye. But, afore I begin, jest gin us a chew of yer pigtail, Alf."

The desired weed being supplied, he stowed away a full ounce in his mouth and began as follows:

"It's a good many years ago, more nor I ken count, since I war down on the forks of the Trinity. Ther war a party

of about a dozen in all, a wilder set of cusses ye couldn't raise up if ye war to try.

"We war out fur a ginerall hunt an' trapping-season of it. We set to work an' built a snug log, an' war us comfortable as we could wish. A short time afore the 'venture I'm a-going to tell ye of, more nor half of us had been out fur a trapping bout. Consequently, we felt a kind of tireish. One morning I set out alone, along the bank of a stream, more to keep my hand in nor fur any thing else.

"I'd not gone more nor a mile afore I struck the fresh trail of a deer. I saw from the size of the hoof-prints he war a large one, so I war detarmined to hev him. I didn't go more nor half a mile on the trail when I heerd a terrible crashing in the thicket nigh by, an' afore ye c'u'd count ten, one of the largest bucks I ever saw dashed out, not five yards from me. I war so taken by surprise that afore I knew any thing the deer war out of range. I war just about to start off in pursuit, when my attenshun war drawn to another quarter. I held my rifle ready a moment more, an' one of the largest an' most devilish-looking wild boars ever the eyes of man saw, rushed out. When he saw this coon he stood still, every hair on his hide bristled up on an ind, while the froth flew in flakes from his mouth. Thar war nothing more sartin than that he would attack me, so I detarmined to hev the first chance. His long, lanky side war toarst me. I took quick aim ahind his shoulder an' fired. He droppel on his knees, an' I war sartin sure I hed 'im, but never war a human more woefully mistaken. Afore I'd time to fodder up he sprung to his feet, an' with a savage roar he dashed at me. I knew if I turned to run it war sartin death, fur no mortal man ken outrun a wild boar. The only thing I could do war to dodge ahind a tree an' keep clear of his long, sharp tusks, an' that I did, about as fast as any varmint ye ever saw. For a moment he stopped an' looked at me, as much as to say, 'I'll hev ye yit.' It wa'n't long afore he leaped at me, an' only that I jest springed the other way, he would hev ripped my side open with them tusks of his'n. As it war, he took off a big slice of the bark of the tree.

"For more nor an hour the blasted brute kept me busy in dodging from tree to tree. He was perfectly frantic with rage.

Once or twice his long tusks grazed my thighs. I war gettin' tired of that kind of sport. I knew if something didn't turn up in my favor soon, I'd be a wiped out coon. I yelled with all my might until I war hoarse, but I might hev saved my wind for better purpose, fur not one of the boys war within a mile of me.

"Not more nor sixty yards from me war a small grove of persimon trees. I knew if I could only manage to reach 'em I'd be all right. Waiting until the boar made a dash at me round the tree, I put for the persimons.

"Wal, boys, I've been often chased by the red-skins in my time, an' done some tall traveling, but never did this coon do such tall running as he did on that special occasion. Close ahind my heels war the infernal brute. Ye may be sure I put in my partiest licks. I reached the grove, an' collecting all my power, I sprung fur the low branch of the first tree an' caught it. Jest as my legs war half-way up I felt 'em gripped. My moccasins, bein' none of the newest, ripped like rotten paper; they wint, an' so did a few ounces of my flesh, but what did I keer fur that just then? I war safe, an' that war enuff.

"Wal, boys, if ye war to see how the cussed imp carried on when I got out of his reach. In five minutes thar warn't a sliver of bark on that tree for five feet that he he'dn't chewed off. Arter I'd rested myself somewhat, I began to foder up, as I was a-going to send 'im a pill to stop his tricks. Jest as I war a-going to fire, I war startled by the ortaldest snore ye ever heard. It w'd 'a woke up the dead. Arter squintin' about a bit, what sh'd I diskiver but a large b'ar fast asleep in the fork of the tree next me. A sudden thert struck me right away. 'Now, old lanky-sides,' sez I to myself, 'ye had it all yer own way a while ago; it's my turn now.' I cautiously climbed up until I got far above the b'ar. I plucked the green persimons an' began to pelt the b'ar with 'em until he woke, growling at bein' disturbed. It warn't long afore he spied the boar. Bruin looked at 'im as much as to say, 'So it war you that woked me?' Thar war mischief in his eye that meant fout."

"To make matters a little lively, I drew a bead on 'im an' hit 'im whar it hurt 'im. My eyes, how he growled an'

scratched the spot whar the bullet struck! The b'ar was sartin sure that the wound was caused by the boar.

"So, to spare himself the trouble of descending, he drapped down on the boar, an' at it they wint, like two devils. The b'ar soon felt the long, sharp tusks of the boar atween his ribs, which only made 'im the fiercer. Fur some time it war give an' take atween 'em. At last the b'ar got his powerful paws around the long, lanky body of the boar. Stars an' garters, didn't porky squeal an' grunt! If ye war thar ye'd say so.

"The fight atween 'em lasted about a quarter of an hour. Arter a bit the grunting an' growling got weaker an' weaker, until both lay without a kick in 'em. When I come down both war dead mate."

"Heaven an' earth! what's that?" shouted one of the party of the name of Davis.

"What's the matter, Davis?" was yelled by all, as they seized their weapons and sprung to their feet. Before Davis could make any reply their ears were startled by a loud crashing in the thicket, and the silence of night was broken by the wildest screams and yells that ever came from the throat of a human being. There was not one of the party who did not feel a strange thrill of horror vibrate through his frame. Each looked into the face of his neighbor, as if to read there a solution to the unearthly sounds that were gradually dying away in the distance.

"Wal, boys, ken eny of ye tell us what's up? I can't, although as man an' boy I've roamed the woods nigh onto thirty years," said Bonte, breaking the pause that ensued.

"What's the use of asking, Bonte, when ye know that come from nothing human. Let's hear what Davis hes to say about it," replied one of the party.

"All I ken say," replied Davis, to the general demand of what he saw, "is, that as I looked out toart the thicket I saw som'at that looked like a human bound ten feet high; his eyes blazed like two small camp-fires, while in his hand he held a large, bloody ax, which he shook at us. That's all I saw; an' I think the sooner we make tracks out of here the better for ourselves."

In that opinion all concurred.

At an early hour next morning they set out from the scene of their night's adventure. They had not gone more than four or five miles when they came upon a strange spectacle. At the butt of a large tree lay a wild and haggard-looking man, fast asleep. The few remnants of clothes that covered his almost naked person hung in shreds about him. His body in several places was fearfully lacerated from briars and thorns. By his side lay a large ax covered with blood. It would be hard to look upon a more woebegone object than that which was presented to their sight.

All the mystery that surrounded the strange adventure of the night previous was now cleared up.

"Who was he, and where did he come from?" were the questions asked by several of the hunters of each other.

"Boys," said Bonte, in a low, solemn voice; "ken it be possible none of ye know him. If ye don't I'll tell ye."

"Ye may knock me stiff if I think his own father or mother would know him. Who is he, Bonte?" asked Alf Foster.

"That man afore ye is Balt Walters, the truest eye on the border. How he come in that there condition is beyond the reckoning of Henri Bonte."

It would be impossible to describe the astonishment of the hunters at this announcement, for there was not one of them but knew Balt. The tears sprung into the eyes of more than one of the party. At that moment the subject of their low whispered conversation sprung to his feet and gazed about him with the fierce and unmeaning stare of a maniac. As quick as thought he darted for his murderous ax, but, before he could clutch it, Bonte and several others cast themselves upon him, and bore him to the earth.

His frantic shrieks and efforts to free himself from them was heartrending in the extreme.

"That's it, father!" he would yell. "Give it to to the murdering imps. Come on, ye bloody hell-hounds! Keep close to me, Amy. No dog of a Dacotah shall ever boast he war a match for Balt Walters! Look out for the boy an' gal old man. We'll beat the cussed dogs off yet."

As soon as the paroxysm had passed away he lay as passive as an infant.

"I'll tell ye what it is, boys," said Bonte, late that evening, "I've been thinking for some time that I ken bring back Balt's scattered senses."

"How, Bonte?" asked Davis.

"Wal, boys, I'll tell ye. I've taken a squint at Balt's head, an' I hev diskivered that a few of the skull bones are drove in on the brain. One thing are sartin, I'll do him no harm if I don't do him no good, an' I think I ken."

As the Canadian was well known for his skill in dressing wounds and other accidents incident to a hunter's life, the whole party concurred with Bonte that if he did him no good he was not likely to do Balt much harm by the surgical operation.

Next day in the presence of the hunters Henri Bonte set about performing the operation indicated. Gently drawing the head of the passive maniac into his lap, he began the delicate task. Slowly he opened the lips of the half-closed wound, until the skull was laid bare, disclosing the cranial fracture. Slowly and with a steady hand the point of a sharp penknife was inserted under the compressed bone. A deep groan escaped from the sufferer, showing that his agony was great, but not an attempt at resistance did he make. Two small splinters of the shattered skull were carefully removed; the depressed bones were lifted from the brain, and the operation was complete.

"Sleep 'll do the rest now," said Bonte, a little proud of his skill, "an' when he wakes up I think Balt Walters 'll be hisself once more."

A decoction of strong narcotic herbs was given to the sufferer, and soon he lay in a sound and calm sleep that lasted for several hours without interruption.

When Balt Walters awoke his countenance no longer bore its idiotic look. Reason once more had regained her throne. With astonishment he gazed about him, and at Bonte, who had never left his side while he slumbered.

"Where am I?" he asked. "What brings me here?" Then, looking at Bonte—"Where is Amy and the children?" Slowly his hand was passed across his troubled brow, and

memory come back with vivid power; the scenes of that wild and awful night were before him. The hot tears coursed rapidly down his wasted cheeks. "Ah, Bonte," he exclaimed, with anguish, "how came I here? How long have I been thus?"

"Sleep now, Balt. To-morrow I'll tell you all," was the reply, in a soothing tone. The effect of the potion had not yet passed away, and he soon was in deep slumber again.

Balt Walters slowly regained his former strength. But the return of bodily vigor brought no peace to the heart of the hunter. His only solace was to wander far into the gloomy forest, and there brood on the days that could never be recalled.

One morning he shouldered his rifle and started out with a full supply of ammunition, saying he might not be back for a week or two. But, weeks glided into months, and months into years, until the name of Balt Walters and his misfortune were but a memory on the border, and still he did not return.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAMP IN THE COPSE.

It was near the close of the month of May, several years after the events recorded in our last chapter, that a large number of trappers, or fur-hunters, were encamped on the lower waters of the Keya Paha, a large branch of the Rapid River—the latter stream being itself a tributary of the Missouri.

The trappers had been encamped here for some time carrying on their avocation, as half a dozen substantially-built huts indicated. These huts were constructed in the center of a close mass of thicket about half an acre in extent, and not far from the bank of the stream. Their presence was completely hidden from view by the foliage of the tall undergrowth.

Not far from the camp a score of horses of the prairie-breed were hobbled out grazing. In front of the huts fires were burning, around which were several women, whose

slightly bronzed complexions in several instances betrayed their Indian origin.

They were busily engaged in preparing the morning meal for their husbands and friends.

Scattered around were the hunters and trappers variously employed. Some were mending and making traps, while others were repairing their weapons, or setting out their furs to dry in the morning sun, preparatory to stowing them away.

"What's the matter, Bonte?" asked a young man, whose dress, equipments and general appearance proclaimed him above the rank of those by whom he was surrounded. The young man in question was the son of a fur merchant in St. Louis of the name of Allen. On the last trip up, this young man, named Jerome, accompanied the brigade to the trapping-grounds for the purpose of enjoying some hunting during the trapping-season.

"That's a sign I've never known to fail," replied the person addressed, an old man who, if looks said any thing, was the leader or captain of the band; "whenever ye see such a flock of vultures as that 'ere ye may be sure that's a large drove of buffaloes on the move. I hope that's no reds ahind 'em," he muttered.

"I hope not," replied young Allen. "A visit from the savages just now might make things uncomfortable for us here."

"Especially if they war some of them thieving cut-throats, the Sioux," responded another, who answered to the name of Alf Foster, and was one of the most trusty of the men.

A few minutes passed when Bonte, who had never taken his eyes from the horizon, where he had discovered the vultures floating in the air like a small cloud, shouted in a tone of alarm.

"By heaven, they are coming this way! Look to the horses, boys; quick for yer lives!"

In an instant the camp was a scene of wild commotion. The horses were immediately driven in and their forefeet fettered, and a stout rope of deer-hile was looped around the neck of each, and pinned by a strong stake driven deep into the ground.

Every eye was cast anxiously to the distant horizon, where clouds of dust were fast rising to view. A low, rumbling sound, like distant thunder, shook the solid earth. In less than ten minutes the largest and fiercest bulls of the drove were seen as they darted along, in mad career, over the rolling swells of the prairie.

Gradually the wide expanse was darkened with a vast mass of moving animals, their center bearing in a straight line for the camp of the trappers.

Something must be done, and that soon, to divert this countless horde from its course, or in a few minutes more the trappers would be trampled to death.

"Come, Henri Bonte," shouted Foster, with pallid countenance, "show us some of yer prairie larning, or we'll be pounded to jelly beneath the hoofs of the varmints."

For a moment the old trapper paused to look at the flying buffaloes; then he shouted, in a firm voice:

"To work, boys! to work! Tear me up a pile of last year's grass, an' I'll answer fur the rest or I'm a boaster."

It did not require a second bidding to set them to work tearing up the withered grass that lay in masses beneath the new growth. Even the women worked with desperation, for they knew that their lives depended upon it. The old trapper had disappeared, but he quickly emerged from one of the huts, carrying a large leather bottle capable of holding a couple of gallons.

"Fetch me a burning stick, an' that's all I want," said Bonte, as calmly as if nothing unusual was transpiring. He had been long accustomed to scenes of danger, and now faced it with invincible courage, as if such trials were a kind of matter-of-course. When the maddened herds were within a hundred yards of them, the flaming brand was applied to the pile of dry grass, and in an instant it shot up in a fierce blaze.

The leading bulls recoiled before the sudden glow; they stopped in their headlong rush; those behind came pressing on, driving the foremost before them, despite their bellows of rage and terror. Again the maddened mass was set in motion.

"The Lord have mercy upon us! We're lost!" screamed young Allen, in wild despair.

"Be quiet, boy; our time to go under hasn't yit come," was the calm reply of the unmoved old trapper, as he raised his rifle and fired at the foremost bull, who rolled over, the bullet passing through the eye to the brain.

At this critical moment, Bonte dashed the leather bottle into the flames. There was a sound as if the solid earth had burst. The leather bottle had exploded; a fierce flame shot up into the heavens. The mighty mass divided. The dismayed beasts dared not face the great column of blue, forked flames which had been created at the cost of two gallons of whisky.

The whole herd, as if animated by the same instinct, parted to the right and left, and like two roaring floods swept along in diverging lines, leaving the camp and grove undisturbed.

"Wal, boy, ye see that the varmints have not trampled us to death," said Bonte, as the living mass bore away, further and further from the camp.

"Ye may knock me stiff, but it war handsomely done, old man," replied Foster, "but, I must say, Bonte, that yer last sample of prairie l'arning 'll cause dry throats in camp fur some time; our whisky's gone far sartin."

"Ah, boys, I've not roamed the prairie fur nothing; ye'll l'arn many a trick of ye tramp with the old feller, that warn't ever dreamed of in the settlements. Ha, boys! what have we here? May the young an' old devil take 'em!"

"What's the matter, Bonte?" inquired a half-dozen voices at once.

"Matter enuff, boys! Just look whar the fog of dust is sweeping away afore the wind, an' tell me what ye see."

Every eye was directed toward the quarter indicated, and there they saw a sight that caused the heart of the bravest of the band to beat faster. Far out on the prairie they detected a band of wild horsemen, at least fifty or more of them darting here and there in pursuit of the rearmost buffaloes.

Whether Pawnees, Otoes or Kansas, none could tell, as the horsemen were too far away, but they were approaching nearer and nearer every moment.

"Sing me, an' roast me fur a coyote, ef they aren't Dacotahs," said a trapper, a half-breed of the name of Valois Casteronix, who was keeping guard with some others over the horses during the trying ordeal they had just passed through.

"Ye are right, Val," responded Bonte. "They are them bloody throat-cutting imps, the Dacotahs, sure as my name isn't Ginseng."

"May I never suck another marrow-bone, but we'll have 'em down on us afore we're ready to receive 'em, if we stay out here in open view much longer," returned the half-breed, who generally prefixed every thing he said with some queer frontier or prairie phrase.

His advice was not lost upon his companions, who instantly sought the shelter of the densest part of the thicket, where they were posted to the best advantage by Bonte, to provide for an attack by the savages.

In a short time the Dacotahs, as if satisfied with what they had slaughtered, allowed the great body of the herd to escape. Soon they began to collect around the carcass of an enormous bull that had been brought down by the successful thrust of a lance in the hands of a young brave.

The distance between the two parties was not more than a quarter of a mile. In a short time the sharp eyes of Bonte and Val Casteronix had measured the proportions and scanned the equipments of each individual of the Dacotah band.

"Wal, boys, I must say it's strange," muttered the old leader, when he had completed his survey of the red-skins.

"What do you mean?" asked young Allen, who, rifle in hand, lay near the advance.

"I'll tell ye, Master Jerome," replied Bonte, in a low voice. "In yonder band of human reptiles thar isn't one of 'em above the rank of a warrior, an' one thing is sartin, them imps never sot out without a chief at thar head. Val 'll tell ye the same thing."

"Wipe this varmint out fur a skunk if it ain't so," responded Casteronix. "But, what do ye call that?" continued the half-breed, pointing to two dark objects moving like the wind over the long land-swells.

"I should call that a buffalo-bull, pursued by an Indian on a horse," replied Jerome, with a low laugh.

"So it is, so it is," broke in Bonte. "An' a long chase the bloody imp has had of it, too. Now, watch that 'ere horse of his'n. He knows what's wanted of 'im, he does! Jest see how he heads off the bull when he attempts to sheer away

either to the right or left. Boys, listen to what I'm a-going to tell ye: the Dacotah is showing off afore his friends. He'll roll over that 'ere buffalo not fifty yards from whar them other imps are standing."

Thundering over the prairie was an enormous buffalo-bull. Close behind him was an Indian mounted on a powerful steed, who showed as much eagerness in the exciting chase as his wild rider. Now he would sheer up alongside of the buffalo, to allow his master to deliver an arrow into the side of the bull, then would suddenly shoot off, just in time to escape the horns of the infuriated animal. The eyes of the shaggy monster glowed like two balls of fire; his tufted tail was curbed on high, or madly lashing his gory sides, as he coursed along.

The words of the old trapper were soon verified. The pace they were going at soon brought the horse and bull near where the Dacotahs stood. A shout from the Indian and the horse reached the side of the game in a dozen springs; the next moment the lance of the savage was plunged into the vitals of the frantic beast. One loud bellow, and the prairie monarch rolled over, dead.

The new-comer was a powerful-looking specimen of the Indian race. His face was painted in alternate lines of red, black and yellow; his dress was adorned with scalp-locks, and feathers from the wings and tails of owls. Instead of the usual shaven crown and single defiant scalp-lock of the prairie tribes, his long, coal-black hair was suffered to float free over his brawny shoulders, which gave him a most wild and ferocious appearance.

Like his companions, he was equipped with a lance, tomahawk and scalping-knife, while over his shoulder were hung a stout hickory bow and a quiver of arrows.

The moment the eyes of Valois Casteronix scanned the features of the fierce savage, his swarthy countenance became convulsed with rage; the veins started like cords on his brow and temple; his eyes met those of Bonte in a look of mental intelligence.

"So ye know the imp?" questioned the old trapper, nodding his head toward the subject of their conversation.

"Know 'im?" hissed the half-breed, in a voice of startling fierceness, at the same time tearing open the breast of his

deer-skin frock, and pointing to a broad, deep scar. "I should think I do! Does not the skulp of my wife hang smoking in the wigwam of Mad Buffalo, the war-chief of the Dacotahs?"

At the mention of the name the old man was visibly moved. And no wonder, for to what hunter or trapper, or to what Indian tribe, from the waters of the far distant Assiniboine in the north to the Rio Grande in the south, was the name and bloody deeds of Mad Buffalo, the head war-chief of the Dacotahs, not known?

A wild Ishmaelite of the wilderness, whose hand was raised in perpetual warfare against the surrounding tribes, he was alike hated and feared over a thousand miles of plain and forest.

"Perhaps the imps may not discover us, after all," suggested Jerome Allen, in a hopeful tone, while his eyes became fixed upon the half-breed.

"Oh, Lord, just hear 'im, Bonte!" was the rejoinder. "Why, Master Jerome, them imps know that thar's whites about, an' what's to hinder 'em? Do ye think 'em so green as not to know who lit that ar fire?"

"Then I suppose we may expect to be attacked by them?"

"Fur sartin; an' I only hope some of the bloody varmin'ts 'll come within range of Val Casteronix's rifle."

A fiendish smile swept over the countenance of the half-breed as he continued:

"The old iron has brought the death-shriek from many a skulking war-father in its time, and ken do it ag'in, durn me if it can't."

"See how the skulp-loving cut-throats pertind to be so busy about the carcass of that 'ere buffalo. But, as sure as my name is Bonte, they are this blessed minute hatching some piece of deviltry to find out who an' what we are. Now, boys, I'll take a turn round the copse to see that all is right. Afore I go, I'll tell ye this: if them imps attack us, ye mustn't throw away a kernel of lead unless ye're sure of giving the red his last sickness, for we'll want all the ammunition we hev afore we're done with them throat-cutting devils."

Ten or fifteen minutes might have passed after the Dacotahs were joined by their chief, when near half the band

sprung on their horses and dashed away until they were lost sight of behind a high swell in the prairie, about half a mile to the south of the thicket. A few minutes later they were seen scampering back as fast as their wild prairie steeds could carry them.

"Wal, may I never claw another slice of buffalo hump but 'twar well done, but 'twon't do, ye blasted rips. There are others who are up to a trick or two," said Casteronix, speaking more to himself than to his companions.

"What trick are they up to now, Val?" asked Foster.

"Jest wait an' ye'll soon see, Alf," was the unsatisfactory reply.

When the savages returned from their wild race the whole party set out in a northerly direction. They had not gone above a mile when they wheeled round and leisurely rode back toward the thicket. When within two hundred yards of it they halted and a brief council took place.

A young brave was suddenly seen to dash out from among the throng; around and round he went, until his prairie pony was going at a frightful pace; then, as suddenly as he began this maneuver, he shot down like the wind, along the edge of the thicket. When nearly opposite to where he suspected the hidden foe lay concealed, he swung himself over the side of his horse until only part of one foot and hand were visible above the back and neck of the flying beast. A shout of triumph was on the lips of the young savage: his lynx eyes had discovered the camp of the trappers!

His triumph was of short duration, for, at that moment, a small puff of smoke rolled out from the thicket. Both man and horse rolled upon the earth. Out of the thicket sprang a man as fierce for blood as a hyena; he rushed for the Indian. Although badly wounded, the young warrior quickly disengaged himself from his dying steed, sprung to his feet, and drawing his hunting-knife, uttered a wild war-whoop and awaited the onset of his assailant.

Little did he know of the strength and skill of the opponent he was to encounter. In less than twenty seconds the knife of Valis Casteronix was sheathed in his heart.

The body of the young Dacotah had hardly reached the earth before the half-breed shook aloft the gory scalp. Giving

a defiant shout of victory he darted back to the shelter of the thicket before the Dakotahs recovered from the sudden surprise caused by the fate of their companion. Rage at once filled the breast of Mad Buffalo. He sprung from his steed, his example being followed by his band. Leaving the horses in charge of a few of the youngest braves, the Dakotahs boldly advanced to dislodge the audacious foe.

When within fifty yards of the thicket, a half-dozen rifles were discharged, and the heart's blood of as many fierce savages dyed the green grass of the prairie. Several other shots followed in rapid succession, causing more than one warrior to measure his length on the earth. The Dakotahs reluctantly had to give way, not expecting such a deadly reception. Their shouts and yells of rage could be heard far out on the plains.

"Now, Alf Foster," said Casteronix, when the Dakotahs had retreated out of range, "ye asked me what trick the sneaking throat-cutters war up to, with thar scampering over the prairie awhile ago. Jest look whar ye see the prairie grass stirring onc't in a while an' tell us if ye ken diskiver any thing."

"By heavens, there is a red-skin crawling through the tall grass," replied Foster, after a short observation.

"Skin me for a skunk, but I should say thar war jest three more clost ahind his heels," returned Casteronix, with a malicious grin that boded the savages no good.

"How can you tell exactly, Val? It beats my comprehension," said Jerome, in a whisper, at the same time regarding his companion with a look of astonishment.

"Oh, Lord! Lord! Where war yer eyes? What do ye think them red devils went scampering over the prairie for, I'd like to know? Wal, I'll tell ye, as ye don't know. When them imps sot out thar war jest twenty-six of 'em; only twenty-one of 'em came back."

"I understand it all now," replied young Allen; "the other savage is holding the horses while his companions are to reconnoiter our position: am I not right, Val?"

"Jest so, Master Jerome; all thar curviting and prancing war only a blind to draw off our attention while these sneaking thieves war carrying out thar deviltry. Let 'em alone;

we'll spile that little game — may I be skulped if we don't."

Right well had Casteronix divined the stratagem employed by Mad Buffalo to gain intelligence of the number and position of the trappers.

Near a hundred yards below where Casteronix and his two companions were posted, lay Bonte and a few others. The movement in the grass did not escape the sharp eye of the veteran, and like the half-breed he knew every move of the savages.

When within a short distance of the spot where Casteronix was concealed, a hideously-painted countenance was cautiously raised above the grass. One moment did those basilisk eyes throw a look of intense hatred toward the thicket. It was their last look of earth; a bullet from the weapon of Val Casteronix cleft the brain of the savage just as his head was disappearing again. The other Dacotahs, seeing that they were discovered, jumped to their feet and sprung for the shelter of the thicket, only a few yards distant, but they were never destined to reach it. The weapons of Bonte's party cracked and two of them were sent to chase the deer and antelope in the mystic heaven of the Indian.

The other Dacotah, more fortunate than his companions, escaped the leaden messenger intended for him. A few bounds and he disappeared in the thicket, only to find himself clasped in the arms of a human being a little less savage than himself. A short, violent struggle took place, and in less time than it would take us to describe it, the warrior lay at the mercy of his antagonist.

Why was the knife stayed in its descent, when, in the twinkling of an eye, it would have struck the seat of life?

Why that wild, ferocious laugh, as the eyes of the half-breed were riveted on the fiery orbs of the prostrated Dacotah? And again, why that look of mortal terror on the fierce war-painted countenance of the savage? In that short space of time they recognized each other! In the Dacotah, Val's Casteronix recognized the red-skin who had dashed out the brains of his child before his eyes, and afterward cast its lifeless body into the flames of his own burning cabin, on the night when his wife was slain by the hand of Mad Buffalo.

The storm of passion that raged in the heart of Casteronix was indeed mighty.

"Do ye know me, murdering dog of a Dacotah?" shouted the half-breed. "Do ye think I'm a-going to kill ye? Yer mistaken if ye do. Death to such an imp of hell would be mercy thrown away. No, Dacotah, I'm not a-going to kill ye, but I'll make ye such an object of horror that the Dacotah dogs 'll turn away from ye as a thing accursed by the Wacondah."

The savage struggled fearfully to free himself, but uselessly, for he was in the hands of an overmastering spirit that kept him down with the strength of a giant.

The hands of Casteronix were not idle. A stout deer-skin thong was wound several times around the arms of the Dacotah, confining them from the elbow upward to his sides. The feet next claimed his attention, and in a short space of time the red-skin lay as helpless as a log, and completely at his mercy.

"What in heaven's name are you going to do with the imp?" asked young Allen, with horror on his countenance.

"Knock 'im on the head, Val," shouted Alf Foster, who suspected that Casteronix was about to perpetrate some piece of merciless cruelty, by way of retaliation, on the unfortunate savage.

"Ye might, Alf, but I won't," replied the half-breed, in a hollow voice; then, as if some explanation of his proceedings was necessary, he continued: "Master Jerome, and you, Alf Foster, listen to what I'm going to tell you. On the night when Mad Buffalo's band attacked my cabin on the Chippewa, this hell-hound dashed out the brains of my little one ag'inst the door-post of my burning cabin. After I made my escape I swore that if he ever fell into my power, I'd lop off his hands, an' I'll do it. His skulp is mine, an' that I'm a-going to have too. When Casteronix, the half-breed, swears a thing, he's bound to keep his oath, that's all."

Jerome Allen and his companion walked away with a shudder, for well they knew that no power on earth could alter the determination of the half-breed, or induce him to forego his fearful vow of vengeance.

They had hardly disappeared from view when their ears were startled by the most fearful shrieks of agony. A few

minutes later they saw a sight that might appal the stoutest heart.

Across the prairie bounded an Indian warrior, whose shrieks and yells were frightful to hear. His head presented one gory mass of blood, the arms were wanting below the elbows, presenting two useless members to a living body.

The horses of the Dakotahs reared and snorted with fright as the hideous object approached them. It would be impossible to describe the unbounded rage and mortification of Mad Buffalo and his band. They dashed down toward the thicket, taking good care not to approach within range of the rifles that had already proved so fatal to many of their friends.

They galloped to and fro, endeavoring by every insulting gesture to induce the trappers to leave the shelter of the grove, or expend their ammunition. All their efforts were vain.

After continuing riding around the thicket for over an hour, in the false hope of finding some weak spot to make an attack, they galloped away, and finally disappeared.

Bente, as captain of the band of trappers, called them all together.

"Now, boys," he began, "my advice is, if we want to keep our hair on our heads, we'd better pack up an' away, for them Dakotahs 'll be back afore ye know, with a band that 'll wipe us from the 'arth if we remain here. The Dakotah chief has many hunting-parties out at this time of the year; he'll soon fall in with some of 'em, an' be back in no time. We needn't expect any mercy, for he never gives any. I know a spot not more nor twenty miles from hyar whar we ken make a camp that'll bid defiance to all the red-skins on the prairie."

In less than an hour the place was as silent and deserted as if it never had been trodden by the foot of man.

CHAPTER V.

THE NAMELESS.

By the side of a rippling stream sat a man eating his frugal evening meal of sun-dried buffalo, washed down by water from the murmuring run at his feet. Not far from the stranger a noble horse was cropping the sweet, luxuriant prairie-grass. The appearance of the man deserves more than a passing notice.

He was a stout, broad-shouldered person, with sharp, regular features, a complexion deeply bronzed by constant exposure to the elements. Both hair and beard evidently had not known the scissors for years, and were of a jet black. The most remarkable feature about him was his eyes. They glanced from side to side, here and there, with the rapidity of thought, never for a moment resting in their sockets, as if in search of some object, or apprehensive of some sudden danger. In fact, they could be compared to nothing but two silent alarms, ever on vigilant duty.

His deer-skin dress displayed none of the fancy fringing so peculiar to all the prairie hunters and mountain trappers. But in the number and quality of his weapons he bestowed more than ordinary care. A long rifle lay close at hand; two pistols, a tomahawk and knife were disposed of about his person, while from the holsters of a Mexican saddle protruded the butts of two more pistols of heavier and longer range than those in his belt. His horse was a magnificent animal, in color a cross between a chestnut and a black; a wild, smart head, a broad forehead, a clear, bold eye, and a tail that swept the ground.

The stranger had just finished his repast, and was about to light his pipe, when a low whinny from his horse caused him to pause; the pipe was at once restored to its receptacle, and the man sprung to his feet.

"What's the matter, Fleetfoot?" he asked, as if it was a human being he was addressing.

The answer he received, if an answer it could be called, was another low whinny from the intelligent brute.

In a moment the restless orbs of the stranger had swept every point of the compass. All at once his gaze became fixed far away toward where the fiery disc of the setting sun was just touching the western horizon.

What riveted his gaze so long in that direction? Right in the wake of the setting sun a large band of mounted savages were clearly outlined against the western sky.

It can not be possible that they are returning so soon," he muttered. "It must be a party of some other tribe out on a hunt. Whoever they are, they are coming this way, and that at a fast gallop. Come, Fleetfoot, yonder grove of cottonwood must give us a cover until they pass."

The horse, as docile as a well-trained hound, followed closely behind his master, toward a grove of cottonwood trees near the bank of the stream.

In less than an hour after the solitary hunter had discovered the Indians, they reined up within a hundred yards of where he was concealed. It was evident from their movements that they intended to camp there for the night. Their jaded horses were staked out to graze by some of the party, while others hastened to the grove for dead wood for a fire to cook their evening meal.

Not a movement escaped the vigilant eye of the concealed man. Did he try to escape? Such, evidently, was not his purpose. A frown as threatening as a thunder-cloud had settled on his dark-hued countenance. Several times did his eye glance along the barrel of his rifle, and as often was his finger on the trigger. If he had only given it the slightest pressure, M. I. Badjo, the Dacotah chief, would have been sent on the spirit-path, traveled of late by so many of his warriors.

Little did the savage Dacotah dream that the enemy he feared most on earth was so near him.

In a short time after camping, the savages were busily engaged in satisfying their voracious appetites on some half-cooked buffalo-meat.

"Ah, by my soul, what can that mean?" spoke the stranger to himself, as the light of the blazing fire showed where several savages had bound up the wounds received in their late

skirmish with the trappers. "I knew something extraordinary must have happened, or the bloody impa wouldn't be back so soon. I warrant me, Mad Buffalo is as mad as one of his wounded namesakes. Why, he must have lost more than a dozen of his best warriors. Let me see," he continued, musingly, "what tribes are likely to be on the hunting-grounds just now? Most likely it war a band of Pawnees. No, by heavens, I have it; the Dacotah has fell in with the band of trappers I heard war down on the Keya Paha. The Dacotah has come back for help, an' he'll be down on 'em afore they know it. I'll just ride down that way an' see as soon as I pay a visit to the camp of yonder bloody hell-hound, or he'll think that the Scourge of the Dacotahs has forgotten 'im."

The musings of this singular man were suddenly interrupted by a strange movement among the red-skins.

From his place of concealment he saw three savages go out to where their horses were grazing, vault on their backs, and dash away over the prairie in different directions.

"I thought as much; gone out in s'arch of their hunting-parties," was his mental exclamation.

After the departure of the three savages, the fire was suffered to burn out, and the whole band rolled themselves up in their blankets and were soon fast asleep. Shortly after midnight the watchful foe arose from his crouching attitude; he spoke a few words in a low tone to his horse, and then led the way, cautiously followed by the faithful animal, who displayed wonderful sagacity in picking his footsteps through the tangled undergrowth.

Having reached the edge of the grove, he again addressed his horse in a caressing tone, and the noble brute stood as still as if he were a bronze statue.

On his hands and knees the white man crawled along, and in a few moments was in the camp of his deadliest enemies.

The night favored whatever purpose he had in view. Fleecy clouds every now and then obscured the bright disc of the moon, then in her third quarter. Warming himself cautiously along, he soon reached the side of the Dacotah chief.

What pen could describe the scowl of hatred that agitated the countenance of the hunter as he gazed upon the prostrate form of Mad Buffalo? Twice did he clutch the handle of his knife, while his countenance exhibited the worse passions of human nature, hatred and revenge.

It must have been a powerful motive that caused him to forego his purpose, when his enemy lay at his mercy.

Bending carefully over the Dacotah chieftain, he gently drew his knife from its sheath; with like caution he collected a large mass of his long, flowing hair in his hand. Finding the knife of the Dacotah too dull of edge for his purpose, he drew his own razor-like blade and severed the long, warty mass of hair.

Having finished that part of his purpose, he wound the hair around the knife and placed both on the breast of the fierce savage. By that act he had heaped insult and degradation upon his enemy. According to the Indian code of honor, there was less disgrace in the loss of the scalp itself. Greater was the degradation to an Indian of the renown of Mad Buffalo, whose savage will was law in his tribe.

The stranger, as if satisfied with the part he had enacted, began to crawl away, but just at that moment one of the Indians awoke.

The hunter lay as still as if the breath had left his body. The savage sprang to his feet and gazed about him for a moment. Lightly stepping over his sleeping companions, he made his way to where the horses were staked out to graze. Keenly was his movements watched by the white foe. No sooner was the back of the warrior turned toward him than he began to creep away in the direction of his own steel.

Finding the horses all right, the Indian was returning to the camp, when his lynx eye discovered another horse close by the grove of cottonwoods.

"Sage are after Fleetfoot? I hope you may catch 'im," muttered the hunter, with a sinister smile, as he saw the savage move off toward his steel. The Dacotah very cautiously approached the horse, who showed not the least sign of fear. His hand was stretched out to seize the deer-skin bridle, when he received a blow on the breast from the forefoot of the animal that sent him sprawling to the earth.

Before he could regain his feet he was clutched by the throat with a grip of steel. In vain the savage essayed to free himself. He was an infant in the arms of a giant.

"It's no use to worry yerself so, ye Dacotah dog," said the stranger, with a grim leer. "The Scourge of your throat-cutting tribe is not likely to let you escape. So you wanted my horse," he continued, in an altered tone of humor. "Red-skin, no Indian dog shall ever back Fleetfoot until—until the Scourge of the Dacotahs goes under, and that won't be until he has sent some more of your treacherous tribe before him."

Gradually the vice-like pressure became more intense, so much so that the fiery orbs of the savage fairly burst from their sockets.

"Now, red dog of an accursed race, away with you to the spirit land!" he hoarsely hissed, as his long, sharp hunting-knife was driven, with awful vehemence, through the heart of the savage.

A smothered groan, a convulsive movement of his limbs, and the Dacotah was dead.

"Another of the red fiends wiped out," muttered the hunter, as he cleansed the blood from his knife on the grass. "Revenge! revenge is sweet, but oh! how it alters us," he continued, in a low, sad tone. "Now, my faithful Fleetfoot, we must put many a mile behind us before we halt for food or rest."

Fleetfoot gave a low whinny of joy as his master sprang into the saddle. Gently at first the intelligent animal stepped out, his footfalls awakening no sound from the soft earth; then gradually increasing in speed until horse and rider were flying over the prairie with the speed of a tornado.

When morning dawned Fleetfoot and his rider slaked their thirst in the sparkling waters of the Keya Paha, many a mile away. After following the course of the stream for several miles, the granite hunter reached the deserted camp of the trappers. The only evidence of the late conflict that met his eye was a pack of wolves, who were gazing over the bones of the dead.

Understanding at a glance how matters stood, he at once set out to follow up the trail of the trappers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER IN THE CAMP.

THE spot selected by Henri Bonte for the future operations of his party, was a small valley, some twenty-five or thirty miles farther down the Koya Paha. Near the center of the valley was a thick copse of alder and willows, while groarser trees were not wanting. Its extent could not have been less than sixty or seventy yards square. Forcing through the outer bushes, there was an open space of clear, level ground, entirely surrounded, on all sides, by dense brakes and shrubbery which completely hid it from view.

Having conducted his party to this natural encampment, the old hunter, accompanied by Jerome Allen, and the half-breed, Castorix, made a careful examination of the thicket. They then selected the best situations that commanded the different approaches, and fortified them with stout logs from behind which they could sweep any hostile party approaching from the prairie. Stout branches were cut and pointed, forming a complete barrier around their camp.

"There, boys; the Davotah may come now as soon as he likes," said Bonte, as he proudly surveyed their defenses. "All that we want now is a little meat, and we ken laugh at Mel Baflo and all the Sioux that ever roamed the prairie."

The night passed without an enemy making his appearance. At an early hour, the whole camp were alert and preparation was made for a hunt. They started off in twos and threes, through the valley, in search of game, according to the instructions of the captain. Young Allen, Alf Foster and Castorix shaped their course up the stream. Game of all descriptions being abundant, the crack of fire-arms echoed almost incessantly in every direction.

The sun had been for some hours climbing the eastern sky, when Jerome Allen and his two companions sat down by the banks of the stream to partake of their morning meal, as their appetites were keen enough after their tramp.

Their simple repast was almost ended, when an object appeared on the river's bank, but at such a distance that they could not make out what it was at first sight.

"It must be a buffalo that has got separated from some passing drove," suggested Jerome Allen.

"A stray buffalo with a riler on his back," was the laughing rejoinder of Foster. "It's a horse; but, shoot me if I ken tell, at this distance, whether it's backed by a white or red. What's yer opinion, Val?"

A minute or two might have passed before the half-breed made any reply, so intently was he regarding the object that had made its appearance.

"It's a white," he at last responded; "but ye may chew me up far tough butter-hump if I ken tell what brings 'im out hyar alone, at this time, when a varmint can't call his ha'r his own from one hour to another. May I be wiped out for a skunk if I keer to go trampin' alone, just now, an' I b'lieve I keer as little for the blasted imps as any varmint who ever skwinted along a clouded barrel, an' that's saying it a little. All I've to say he's a cus'd feed, or he must be the NAMELESS HUNTER hisself, who keeps no more far the red devils than I do of lifting the skulp of a beast or a Dacotah."

"Who is the Nameless Hunter, Val?" asked young Allen. "That's a personage I never before heard of."

"Never heard of the Nameless Hunter, Master Jerome?" reiterated Casteronix, with a look of astonishment. "I thort thar wasn't any one but had heard of the Nameless Hunter, or the Scourge of the Dacotahs, as he's sometimes called."

"Who is he, or what is he like?"

"All I know of 'im is this—that, for years he's roamed the prairys alone. No one knows his haunts, an' I more nor suspect he'd thank no one to ask 'im. Although he's called the Nameless Hunter, yit he's got a powerful lot of ha'ntes from the reds. The Kiawas, Ojibwas, an' even the tribes call 'im. Ma-chi-tao-me-to, which signifies the Spirit of Evil, an' a white both they gin 'im. All the different branches of the Sioux nation call 'im the Scourge of the Dacotahs, as he's sent more of 'em out of this world than any score of men who ever came upon the prairies. An' like myself," said Casteronix,

with a fiendish smile, "he loves a Dacotah's death shiek better nor roast buffler-hump."

"Then you must be acquainted with him," said Jerome, with the intention of learning more of the history of the strange being who had excited his curiosity.

"Thar's whar ye're mistaken, Master Jerome. He an' I never met but onct, an' then by chance. We war both on the trail of a small party of Dacotahs."

"Let's hear all about it, Val," requested Foster.

"Wal, boys, it happened in this way. About four or five years ago a small party of us war out fur-hunting on the head waters of the Big Cheyenne. Never in all my experience did I see varmints so plenty. The very smallest streams swarmed wid 'em, an' ye may be sure we put in our purtiest licks. In less nor a month we'd taken more poltry nor many a big Hudson's Bay Brigade in a whole season. One morning I set out alone for some high hills about fifteen miles to the west of us, for the purpose of hunting up a b'ar. Arter tramping around for several hours, I set down by the side of a large rock to ate a bite I had brought wid me, as I felt a kind of w'lish. My jawtacklin' had hardly set to work on the beaver-tail when I discovered five war-painted imps coming round a spur of the hills. Ye may be sure I shud to kiver. In a short time they passed by whar I war hid. They had only a few skulls, an' old squaws' at that. If they ha'n't much ha'r, they had captured one of the loveliest young Pawnee girls I ever set my two prepers onto. I saw at a glance that she war the daughter of some renowned chief by her dress and ornaments. 'Now, Val Casteronix,' ses this varmint to hisself, 'are ye a-going to let thim throat-cutting Dacotahs carry off the gal?' Now may I be teetotally singed if I war! I let the imps git well out of sight afore I started arter 'em, for I knew I could just come up wid 'em any time I wanted. All that day did I follow 'em. A little afore sundown they strack off into a deep ravine that extended for several miles between the high hills. Just as I war about to enter the ravine, a wild-looking man sprung out of a thicket close by.

"'Not so fast, my friend,' ses he, laying his hand upon my shoulder. 'I know ye want to rescue the gal; follow my advice an' it shall be did. The men bringin' divils have gone up an

thar last war-path ; if we are careful not one of 'em shall see termorrow's sun.'

"Wal, may I be singed to death, but I war afraid of 'im at fust. Oh ! if ye war only to see thim wild, fiery eyes of his'n ! They never rested fur a minute in one direction, but kept glancing every which way at onct.

" 'What's yer handle, stranger ?' I axed, never onct taking my eyes off 'im, and I more nor 'spicioned he wa'n't all right in his upper story.

" 'Friend,' ses he, slowly fixing his eyes upon this varmint, 'it's years since I had one, save what the prairie hunters an' mountain trappers gave me.'

" 'If thar is no harm in axing, what mout that be ?' I axed.

" 'The Nameless Hunter.'

" 'Thin ye're the varmint that the Sioux call the Scourge of the Dacotahs.'

" 'I b'lieve I am,' he replied, wid a laugh like a growl. 'I acknowledge thar isn't much love atween us,' he continued. 'Come wid me, an' ye shall see that the cut-throat does hain't guv me the name fur nothing.'

" In place of follering the trail through the ravine, the Nameless Hunter led me around a dense thicket that skirted the base of one of the hills. We hedn't gone more nor a quarter of a mile whin he gave a low whistle, an' presintly one of the most splendiferous hosses—an' I've seen some in my time—bounded out from ahind a high shelving rock.

"Wal, boys, arter traveling fur better nor an hour through rocky passes only known to the Nameless, we found ourselves in the ravine through which the Dacotahs had passed. We'd only gone a short distance when the Nameless halted. From the holsters of his hoss's saddle, who had followed us all the time, he drew two long, heavy pistols. One of them he handed to me, saying :

" 'Now, my friend, we're near the end of the trail. Not more nor three hundred yards farther up this gulley, these Dacotah dogs are camped.'

"Shoot me if I ken see how ye're so sartin of finding 'em so exact,' ses I, not a little surprised. The Nameless looked at me fur a minute afore he sed a word.

" 'My friend,' ses he, 'fur the last ten days thim red reptiles haven't been out of my sight fur two hours at a time. I've been so nigh 'em at times that I c'u'd put my hand upon 'em. In case they war pursued an' git separated, they war to make fur this spot whar they are camped now. Little do they think that thar greatest enemy is so near 'em. Move carefully, my friend, an' I'll soon show ye the red fiends.'

" Having spoken a few words to his boss, the Nameless Hunter began to creep carefully along. Whin we'd got about two hundred yards the ravine suddenly turned.

" 'Thar,' ses he, pointing to a deep rift that ran up from the ravine, 'we'll find the imps up thar.' An' so we did. They war squatted around a small, clear fire, cooking thar supper. A little distance from 'em lay the young Pawnee gal, wid her hands an' feet tied, to prevint her escaping. Having crept alind some loose bowlders that lay scattered around, the Nameless whispered :

" 'Ye take the nearest wid yer rifle, while I'll pay my respects to the imp nigh the gal. Thin up an' use yer pistol on the fast that suits ye. I'll answer for the other two.'

" Whin all war settled we both blazed together, an' the two never knew what had hit 'em. The other three sprung to thar feet. We didn't give 'em much time to consider what war up, but popped at 'em wid the short-shooters. The Nameless brought a death-shriek from his imp, while this varmint, not bein' used to handle so short a shooter, only slightly wounded the other. As soon as we fired we sprung to our feet an' dashed in fur a close hunt. It's enuff to say that in less than five minutes Val Carter was laid lile five Dakota top-knives.

" Wal, boys, ye may be sure that the young Pawnee gal war surprised at the turn of things. We very quickly freed her hands an' feet. She told us that she war Starlight, the daughter of Santahanta, a great Pawnee chief. She further informed us that her father an' brother, the renowned Wild Arrow, wid all thar band, war out on a grand hunt whin the treacherous Dakotas attacked the village she belonged to."

" How did ye manage wid the gal?" asked Foster, interrupting Carter in his eagerness to hear the finale.

"Jest wait, an' ye'll hear. At an early hour next morning the Nameless an' this varmint set out fur the Pawnee village. We'd not gone very far arter we'd passed through the ravine whin we diskivered a large band of reds far off on the prairie, an' coming toward us as fast as they c'u'd lift the Dacotah trail.

"Shortly arter we'd diskivered the Pawnees, fur well we knew who they war, the Nameless halted and ses:

" 'My friend, we part here; I more than suspect that thar may be some warriors in yonder band I keer not to meet at presint. Go for'ard wid the gal. Ye've done 'em a service, an' they won't forget it. Farewell; we may meet again.' Wid not another word he wheeled his hoss about, an' war away wid the speed of an antelope. From that day to this I've never sot my eyes upon 'im, but I've heard of 'im often from trappers. Whoever wants to find 'im has only to go on the trail of the Dacotahs an' he's sure to fall in wid the Nameless Hunter an' his hoss Fleetfoot.

"Wal, boys, ye'd think that Santalanta would go crazy at recovering his gal. I sw'ar but I think if I war to ax 'im fur his skulp he'd hev gi'n it. Nothing would do but that he sh'u'd go wid me to our camp. They made us pull up stakes an' go down on thar hunting-grounds, whar we trapped the rest of the season.

"I tell ye one thing, Master Jerome, yer father never had a finer lot of peltry than he got from us that season."

By the time Casteronix had concluded, their strange visitor was not distant more than a quarter of a mile.

"May I be skinned alive if it ain't the Nameless Hunter an' his hoss Fleetfoot," said Casteronix to his two companions.

"I must say that I wou'd not like to have him my enemy," responded Jerome Allen, who was keenly scanning the person of the approaching horseman. "That horse of his is a matchless animal."

"The Hudson Bay Company hev'n't money enuff to purchase 'im," was the curt reply of the half-breed.

A few minutes later they were joined by the subject of their conversation. There is little ceremony between western hunters on meeting, and so it was on the present occasion. Quick and sharp was the glance bestowed by the stranger on Alf

Foster. He at once recognized the half-breed as his companion in the rescue of the Pawnee girl; they were immediately at home with each other.

"By heavens! I've seen that man before now," whispered Foster in the ear of young Allen, "but where or when I can't think. I've seen 'im, of that I'm sartin."

Having secured as much meat as they could carry, they set out for the camp. Some distance from their encampment they were met by Bonte, who started on seeing the stranger. His thoughts of the man ran in the same channel as those of Foster. He had seen the Nameless Hunter before, but where or under what circumstances he could not then call to mind. If the Nameless Hunter knew either Foster or the old leader, he did not in any shape betray it.

Bonte at once informed his visitor of the attack of Mad Buffalo on his camp and their repulse.

The latter in return assured the captain that he would certainly be attacked by a strong band before two days had expired. Before nightfall the Nameless Hunter departed, not without promising to be back next day at the latest.

"Say, Bonte," exclaimed Foster, after the departure of the singular man, "I'll bet my best rifle against a skunk-skin that I've seen that 'ere hunter without a name afore to day."

"Hyar's one won't take up that 'ere wager," replied the leader, "for my therts hev been running the same way ever since I set my eyes upon 'im this mornin', but nohow ken I place 'im. It's years since I've seen 'im—of that I'm sartin."

After a few minutes' deep thought Foster sprung in the air and shouted:

"May I be rubbed out afore morning if I don't think I've got 'im!"

"Spit it out, an' let's hear his name," requested Bonte, impatiently.

Foster whispered a name in the ear of the old man that made him start.

"It's almost an impossibility, Alf, fur I'd sw'ar he'd gone under years ago. If it's him I'll never believe a varmint pegged out unless I see'd it myself. Still, circumstances 'd almost say ye're right. If I live till to-morrow I'll find out."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHITE CHIEF.

WHEN the Nameless Hunter left the camp of the trappers he struck off in a northerly direction. For several hours he kept on without pause; even the darkness of night did not in the least retard his speed, until he reached a small glen that intersected two hills whose sides were covered with a tall growth of brushwood.

Having advanced a short distance up the glen, he reached a sheltered nook where the grass grew tall and luxuriant, promising a bountiful banquet to his faithful steed. Here he sprung from the saddle, suffering Fleetfoot to graze free and unrestrained. Casting himself on the soft grass by the side of a rock, he remained several minutes lost in deep thought.

"Oh! how their presence carries me back to other scenes and other times!" he muttered, audibly. "Little did either Foster or Bonte suspect who it was that was speaking to 'em, an' how could they, when they think, as every one else does, that I've gone under long years ago? They are in danger, an' I must not be far away when the murdering whelps of Brutes come down on 'em, although, I must allow, Bonte has fixed up a splendidious ambushment. It will be a cunning red-skin that circumvints that good old man. Little did I ever dream of seeing him or Foster on this 'arth again."

Having carefully disposed of his weapons about his person, the Nameless Hunter rolled himself up in his blanket, and his heavy breathing soon announced that he was fast asleep.

The darkness of night was fast fleeing before the ruddy hues of morning when the hunter was aroused from his slumbers by a loud snorting from his horse. He at once arose and gazed about him, but at that instant several crouching figures sprung up from the tall grass and cast themselves upon him. Although aided by his sagacious Fleetfoot, who reared and plunged upon his assailants, the hunter was quickly overpowered and his hands securely bound behind his back.

"Why is a pale-face found on the hunting-grounds of the Pawnees? Does he think that he can make a trail that the eye of a Loup can not see?" asked an old warrior, who was the leader of the party.

"Is a Pawnee Loup the master of the prairies, that every one must ask, 'Can I not hunt here or there?' Do the Kansas, Osage, and all the prairie nations come an' ask the Pawnee where they shall kill the buffalo?" boldly replied the hunter, in the Pawnee language.

"The pale-face has the heart of a treacherous Sioux. He has to steal at night what he dare not take when the eye of a warrior is upon him. The Pawnee is master of the prairies."

"Go to! Where was the Pawnee two suns ago, when the Dacotah was killing the fattest bulls of his herds? Mad Buffalo laughs at the name of a Pawnee Loup!" tauntingly replied the hunter.

"Wah! The pale-face has the lying tongue of a Dacotah dog. He has never seen a warrior; his eyes can see nothing but a Sioux thief, whose chief trembles at our young chief, the Wild Antelope, the war-eagle of the Pawnees! For once he shall look upon a nation of warriors."

One of the Pawnees gave a low whoop. Presently two braves made their appearance, leading the horses of the party. The Nameless Hunter was assigned his own, for none of the Pawnees cared to straddle so fierce a beast. Fleetfoot had not ceased to strike at and bite all who came within reach.

When all were ready they set out across the prairie in the direction of their own hunting-grounds.

A few hours before sundown they struck a fresh trail, which, after half an hour's riding, brought them into the temporary camp of near a hundred warriors. Their war-painted countenances at once informed the captive hunter that they were not out to hunt, but on the war-path against some of the numerous tribes who usually, about that time of the year, were to be found on the prairies hunting.

As soon as the Nameless Hunter was brought into camp, he was at once surrounded by a crowd of young braves, whose eyes seldom looked upon a pale-face. Suddenly all

drew back, and their noisy clamor was hushed as an old chief of lofty bearing came upon the scene.

His appearance at once proclaimed him a great chief. His features were striking; he was apparently about sixty years of age, but his movements were as active as those of a warrior of half his years.

The Pawnee chief we have endeavored to describe was Santalanta, one of the most sagacious and renowned warriors of the nation.

"Does the hunter of the white-skins understand the language of the great Pawnees?" he asked of the captive.

"As well as my own," was the prompt reply.

"What has brought him on the hunting-grounds of the Pawnee?" was the next question asked.

"Did my father ever pass beyond the broad prairies he calls his own?"

The Pawnee chief gave a scornful laugh at the question, as he replied:

"Did Santalanta ever strike the Kansas, Otoes, Arapahoes, Cheyennes, and the cowardly Sioux in their own wigwams? Is Santalanta a boy? Yes, pale-face, I have, and their scalps hang in the lodge of a Pawnee chief!" he answered, with all the lofty pride of an Indian warrior who can boast of his warlike achievements before his people.

"Then, Pawnee, I have traveled from the land of the pale-face to that of the Indian that I might strike my enemy, and I have done it," was the bold reply.

"A warrior's name should not be hid behind a cloud," curtly replied the chief.

"Pawnee, neither does mine. The hunters and trappers of my own race call me the Nameless Hunter, because I don't sing my name and thoughts to every one I chance to meet. The Sioux call me by another, for reasons best known to themselves."

"By what name do the throat-cutters call the white warrior?" next inquired Santalanta.

"Chief of the Pawnee Loups, I'm the Scourge of the Dacotahs!"

Had a bombshell exploded among them it could not have created a greater surprise than did that announcement. In a

minute it had passed from mouth to mouth ; all crowded round to feast their eyes upon the pale-face warrior whose very name made the Dakotahs tremble. In an instant, half a dozen braves sprung forward to sever the bonds that bound his hands.

"Great warrior of the pale-faces !" shouted Santalanta, seizing the hands of his late captive, "a Pawnee chief calls you brother. The treacherous Sioux shall hide like a fox when he hears that we are on his trail. The Scourge of the Dakotahs shall be welcome in the wigwams of the Pawnees, for their chief has said it."

"Chief and warriors of the Pawnee nation, let your ears be open and listen to the words that fall from my mouth. The tongue of the Nameless Hunter is not forked. What he says ye may believe.

"The grass has grown and withered many times on the great plains since a young hunter of the pale-faces went out to chase the deer. Returning home he found an Indian warrior wounded by the arrow of a Dakotah. Did the young pale-face leave his red brother to die ? No, he flung the deer from his back, drew the arrow from the wound, and carried the warrior home to his cabin."

Before the Nameless Hunter could proceed any further, Santalanta sprung forward and shouted, joyfully :

"Warriors of the Pawnee Loups ! Before you stands your white chief ! Let your eyes behold the proof !" He bared the arm of the hunter, displaying to their astonished gaze the Loupine totem of their nation.

"Warriors !" he continued, "Santalanta has often told you of your white chief. He is found at last. The Great Spirit loves his brave children, the Pawnees ; he has restored to them a warrior that will make your enemies tremble at his name. **My brother is welcome.**"

It would be impossible to describe the scene that followed. Joy was expressed by the wildest gestures. Some shouted their war-cries at the top of their voices ; some danced, while others gave utterance to wild war-whoops that would cause the blood to run cold. Several braves immediately set about preparing a great feast in honor of the new-found white chief.

How did the Nameless Hunter take all their noisy demonstrations? Calmly, but, at the same time, he felt highly pleased that it would now be in his power to render good service to his friends, the trappers, in case they were attacked by Mad Buffalo's band.

"Why is it that I do not see the great warrior of your nation?" he asked of Santalanta, as he ran his eye over the assembled band, finding none to answer to the descriptions he had often received from trappers of the young war-chief of the Pawnees, whose fame rivaled that of Mad Buffalo, the Dacotah.

For a moment a cloud settled on the brow of Santalanta, but it passed away as quickly as it came, and he hastened to reply.

"The War-eagle of the Pawnee Loups has gone to look for the trail of the Dacotah. Before the sun has drank the dew from the prairies the Wild Antelope will return."

Shortly after daylight the Nameless Hunter was aroused by several loud and prolonged whoops, as if given by some person at a distance. He at once sprung to his feet. The cause of the shouts was soon apparent. Coming toward the camp as fast as their wild horses could bear them, were five Pawnees. The foremost of these the Nameless Hunter at once singled out by his appearance as the renowned Wild Antelope.

A few minutes and the Pawnee sprung off his horse not many yards from where the Nameless Hunter stood.

Quick and penetrating was the look of curiosity cast by the young Pawnee on the person of the hunter.

What was it that caused the heart of the Nameless Hunter to beat with a strange and unobtainable emotion? He stood like one in a trance. Every lineament of the young chief was taken in with a fascination he could not comprehend. Was it the fine and athletic proportions of the young brave that excited his admiration? No; some other and more powerful motive was stirring every fiber of his being.

There was that in the personal appearance of Wild Antelope to excite admiration in the dullest observer. What was particularly noticeable was the Caucasian cast of head and face. None of the distinctive marks so peculiar to the Indian

face were there, save the deep tint of the skin. His head was closely shaved, save the crown, where floated the scalp-lock. The pigment with which he was painted gave to his countenance a fierce aspect, which was not in the least diminished by the scalps which fringed the edges of his deer-skin leggings. His age could not have been more than five and twenty years.

The moment that the young chief sprang from his horse, the animal was taken in charge by one of the young braves whose attendance upon him was marked by the greatest deference. Bending his head gracefully in recognition of the mature years of the pale-face, who he knew must be a welcome guest or he would not be at liberty, the Wild Antelope made his way to where Santalanta was in deep and earnest conversation with a few old warriors whose counsel was prized on the war-path. A few words from Santalanta informed him of the rank of their guest. Returning immediately, he took the hand of the Nameless Hunter and placed it on his heart, saying:

"My white father is welcome. His red children shall be happy when his voice is heard in council. Wild Antelope has two fathers now to show him the path that leads to the blessed prairie. The Scourge of the Devils will ever find a son in the War-eagle of the Pawnees. Their war-whoops shall be heard together in the ears of the cowardly cut-throats."

"The Devils are snakes; they dare not shut their eyes in the night; they sleep in the sun. Their scalps are so plenty that my son trods upon them," replied the hunter, pointing to the scalps on his leggings.

The compliment was appreciated, coming as it did from so renowned a warrior.

"What dog of a Sioux ever looked in the face of my father and returned to boast that he had seen the back of the Scourge of the Devils? The plains and buffalo are for men; the Sioux is satisfied when he can eat what the Pawnee leaves behind him."

At this point of their conversation they were joined by Santalanta and the old warrior before mentioned. A short council took place in which the Nameless Hunter informed

them of the situation of his friends, the trappers. It was unanimously agreed that the whole band should set out immediately to their assistance.

In less than ten minutes a strong body of the warriors were flying across the prairies toward the camp of the trappers.

Often and often that morning did the Nameless Hunter ask himself the question :

"What is it that makes me feel toward this young Pawnee chief as I've not felt for years for any human being?"

Time will solve that question.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK," ETC.

WHAT pen can describe the mortification and rage that burned in the breast of Mad Buffalo when he awoke and became aware of the deep and lasting degradation which he had suffered? He needed no one to tell him who was the perpetrator. There was but one being who would dare to do the deed.

What! he, the most renowned warrior of his race, lying at the mercy of a hated pale-face who scorned to take his life? The very thought made him grind his teeth with madness. He never would rest until he had the scourge of his race in his power. Oh! then what tortures would he not wreak upon his victim! That thought banished the severed scalp-lock from his mind for the time being. It was balm to his frenzied soul. A short survey of the cottonwood grove made them acquainted with the place of concealment of the Nameless Hunter, which was further confirmed by the dead **Dacotah warrior near the spot.**

How impatiently did Mad Buffalo await the return of his carriers; about noon two of them came in, accompanied by a large hunting-party. The third returned within an hour after, having failed to fall in with any more of their warriors.

A council was at once called. When every one was in his place, Mad Buffalo stood in the center and began:

"Why has Mad Buffalo called the warriors of his nation together? Is it to tell them where to find the buffaloes on the plains? No! Was it to tell them of the scalps they have taken in battle? No! Was it to tickle their ears with sweet words? No! He has called the braves of the nation that he might tell them where to find the cowardly Long Knives who have made many a Dacotah lodge empty. Is not Mad Buffalo a chief? Is there a tribe on the plains that he has not struck? Look at his war-shirt; are not their scalps upon it? Shall a chief of the warlike Dacotahs be called a dog by the Long Knife thieves? Shall he sit on the ground while they spit in his face and defy him on his own hunting-grounds? No!" he shouted, with vehemence. "Shall we sit like whipped children and eat the offal left by the pale-faces? See," he yelled, almost choked with rage, "what one of the accursed race has done to your chief!" As he spoke he drew from the breast of his flock the shorn scalp-lock and knife as he had found them. "Need I tell you who has done this insult to your chief? No! What warrior among you but has to mourn some friend slain by the hand of the Scourge of the Dacotahs? Are we a nation of squaws to sit and whine like starved wolves? No!" he thundered. "The Dacotahs are a nation of warriors, and the scalps of the cursed Long Knives shall be ours! Braves of the Sioux nation, has **Mad Buffalo spoken right?**"

A shout that could be heard far away was the reply.

Before five minutes had passed they were on their way back to wreak their vengeance on the trappers.

"Not a sign yet of our friend the Nameless Hunter," said Brown to several of his friends who stood a short distance from the camp, talking of the probability of soon seeing some signs of the Dacotahs.

"Well, boys, all I've got to say is," responded Casternix, who was present, "that when ye see the Scourge ye may take yer affidavit that the throat-cutters aren't far off."

"What makes you think so, Val?" asked young Allen.

"I'll tell ye, Master Jerome: the Nameless wint out fur

nothing else but to watch theimps. Ye may be sartin sure he's not fur from their trail this present minute. It's his way; he'll be totin' about 'em until he l'arns all their plans; thin ye'll see 'im back, not afore. It's not the first time he's did it. Many an' many a trapper would ha' been wiped out only fur he was wid 'im in time. Thar's nothing he likes better nor to diskiver about a half a dozen Dacotahs far out on the prairie. Thin he totes round an' round 'em, never stopping till he's wiped 'em all out. It'll be a dark day fur 'im when he loses Fleetfoot. I'll teil yer one thing, boys, Val Casteronix is a-going to take a tramp around an' try if he ken see any signs."

Vaulting on the back of his prairie steed, the half-breed was soon out of sight. Mile after mile were quickly passed and not a sign did he see. He was just on the point of returning toward the camp, having almost made a circuit around it, when he thought he discerned some large body moving far away down on the very edge of the horizon. After watching for some time he became almost positive that it was a large band of Indians. By gaining the crest of a high swell in the prairie, he was enabled to observe them better. He had not long occupied his new position when every warrior was clearly outlined against the western sky. That it was the Dacotahs he had not a shadow of doubt. Waiting to see no more, he at once put his horse to his utmost speed. An hour or so after he reached the camp.

"Well, Val, my boy, what's the matter?" asked young Allen, anxiously.

"Thar a-coming," was the laconic reply. "We'll hev all we ken do to look out fur our ha'r."

"Are they strong?" inquired the old leader, calmly.

"Not less nor a hundred, perhaps more."

"To yer places, men," shouted Bonte. "They'll find us ready to receive 'em. It's not likely they'll show 'emselves about the camp till arter dark."

In a short time every man was in his place, ready to give the Dacotahs a warm reception. An hour passed and the Indians came in view around a high swell about three miles away.

"Heaven an' 'arth, what ken this mean?" shouted Bonte,

springing to his feet. "They are not the Dacotahs! Pawnees! as I live!"

"Ye're right, Bonte; they are the Pawnees of the Loup; an' may I be singed, roasted an' burnt at the stake if the Nameless Hunter aren't wid 'em," screamed Val Casteronix..

"Can it be possible that he has played us false and brought these red devils upon us?" said Jerome Allen, with a pallid cheek.

"If I thort so," said Foster, "I'd soon send a bullet through his heart."

"No! no!" responded the old captain, "if he is the man I think he is, ye will find him as true as steel. Still, it's all a mystery to me."

"Wal, boys, we'll soon know whether they come as friends or foes," said Foster, examining the priming of his rifle. "It's allers best to have yer shooting-irons ready in a case like this."

"My hair against a charge of powder I understand it," shouted Casteronix, tossing his wolfskin hat high in air, and catching it as it came down.

"Spit it out, then, old skulp-lifter," said Foster, striking the butt of his rifle on the earth.

"Wal, boys, here it is. Ye all know as well as this varmint that the Pawnees an' Dacotahs are mortal enemies. Now, the Nameless knows this, an' has gone an' brought down the Loups to be on hand whin the Dacotahs come toting around. Shoot me if 'tain't so!"

"God grant that you may be right, Val," replied young Allen, fervently.

"I should not wonder much if ye have hit the mark in my case, this time, Val," said Bonte, cheerfully.

When within a few hundred yards of the thicket, the Pawnees halted. Only a few minutes passed when the Nameless Hunter and two chiefs were seen advancing.

"Here, boys," yelled Casteronix, "it's all right! I s'pect that Wil Andope, an' his father Santalanta, remembers one Val Casteronix. If they don't it's something strange."

Foster and several of his friends at once hastened to meet them. The minute that the two chiefs got sight of

the half-breed, they sprung from their horses and greeted him cordially.

Casteronix immediately introduced them in due form to his friends. All the trappers were favorably impressed with the noble bearing of the two chiefs.

As the Dakotahs might be expected to make their appearance at any moment, a short and earnest conversation took place. It was settled that Santalanta and part of the band should conceal themselves in the thicket, with the trappers, while Wild Antelope should conduct the rest a short distance up the valley, to a copse of some extent. Having posted his men to the best advantage, he was to leave them in charge of Casteronix and a few other old warriors of experience, while himself and the Nameless Hunter were to set out and watch for the Dakotahs.

The path they intended to follow was up the Keya Paha, for they well knew that, when the Dakotahs reached the scene of their former defeat, they would have no trouble in following the trail of the trappers. Having found it, no one would follow it up with greater care than Mal Buffalo. His pertinacity in that respect was proverbial. They were well aware that the Dakotah chief would thoroughly examine every spot that could afford the whites a shelter, before he advanced. An ambushed foe always is more dreaded by an Indian than three times their number in open battle.

Up the Keya Paha for several miles they rode, watching for every sign of their enemy. At last, the sharp eyes of the young chief discovered, a great way off, an Indian approaching. They knew at once he was an advance scout, on the trail.

"Would my father like to see the Wild Antelope put a cloud of dust before the eyes of the Dakotah?" asked the Pawnee chief of his companion.

"The breath of Mal Buffalo may blow it away," laconically replied the Nameless Hunter.

"My father shall see," quickly replied the young chief.

From a pouch generally carried by the Indians of the plains, he drew forth different colored clays, and soon had transformed himself into an Ojibwa warrior, so effectually that his most intimate friend would not have known him. When

all was complete for his purpose, he said to the Nameless Hunter, laughingly :

"Let my father return and tell our friends that White Raven, the Ojib chief, will lead the Dacotahs into their camp."

The Nameless Hunter, comprehending the ruse, at once set out for the camp. We will follow the fortunes of Wild Antelope.

Slowly did the Pawnee chief ride forward to meet the coming Indian scout. He saw, by numerous owl-feathers in his hair, and the scalp locks that fringed his hunting-shirt, that he must be a chief of eminence.

While yet some distance away, the Pawnee extended his arms to a horizontal position, to announce that he was a friend. The Dacotah answered the signal by holding one of his hands out, with the palm downward.

"Is an Ojib tired of his scalp that he is found on the path of the Dacotah?" was the salutation of the Dacotah, his whole manner betraying a distrust of the other.

"Has the war-whoop of an Ojib never been heard in the villages of the great tribe of the plains?" was the reply. "The Dacotahs are not squaws; their enemies do not laugh when they go on the war-path. An Ojib is not afraid to trust himself alone in their lands."

"Has the Ojib any name among his people?" asked the Dacotah, with less suspicion in his manner.

"When my nation go on the war-path, White Raven is not the last to strike his tomahawk into the post."

"The name of White Raven is not strange to Dacotah ears. Why is he alone on the plains?"

"The warriors of White Raven are away toward the Stony Mountains. Only two days ago we crossed the trail of the Mischimomesto. White Raven sent his young men to chase the buffalo, while he followed the trail of the evil pale-face."

"Did the White Raven find the scourge of my people?"

As the Dacotah asked the question, his eyes were fixed upon the countenance of Wild Antelope as if he would read every thought there. Nothing could be calmer than was the appearance of the young Pawnee, as he replied:

"He did, but Mat-che-mo-me-to was not alone; a small party of pale-faces are with him. The chief of the Otoes is not the Wacondah; the pale-faces are too many for one lone warrior. He sung soft words in their ears, saying, 'Before two days the young men of White Raven will be back.'"

At this point of their conversation the main body of the Dacotahs made their appearance. At first Mad Buffalo regarded the presence of the Otoe chief with suspicion, as the Otoes and Sioux were never the best friends. His doubts of White Raven were quickly dispelled and changed to joy, when the young chief informed him that the curse of his tribe was in company with those he was in pursuit of.

"Will the chief of the Otoes join the warriors of Mad Buffalo in sweeping the thieving pale-faces from off the earth?" asked the Dacotah.

"Will the starved wolf spare the wounded buffalo? When he does, White Raven will show mercy to the Long Knives," was the prompt reply.

"My brother says well. The Indians of the plains should bury the hatchet; they have enemies enough in the thieving Long Knives."

"When the great chief of the Dacotahs speaks his words should not be allowed to blow away like smoke," again replied the counterfeit Otoe.

From the information imparted by White Raven, regarding the situation of the trappers' camp, Mad Buffalo deemed it best to defer the attack until after dark. Just at nightfall they reached the opening of the valley in whose midst the camp was situated.

Acting upon the advice of the fictitious Otoe chief, Mad Buffalo divided his band. One half, under the leadership of a sagacious old warrior, were to make a detour round to the upper end of the valley, while the Dacotah chief himself should conduct the other party up the valley. At a given signal both parties should fall upon the unsuspecting trappers from opposite sides as near the same moment as possible.

"My brother is a great warrior," said the Dacotah, well pleased at the feasibility of the plan. "He has not sat at the council-fire of chiefs where idle words were spoken."

When the hour drew nigh for the first party to set out, Wild

Antelope offered to guide them, as he was well acquainted with the route. The offer was accepted, without hesitation.

It was not far from midnight when the party conducted by Wild Antelope reached the northern extremity of the valley. Slackening their speed, they advanced with silence and the utmost caution. It was not long before he was able to make out the thicket where his own warriors were concealed. Now began the most critical part of his plans, and that was to inform his own warriors of his presence without exciting the suspicion of the Dakotas. Bringing his horse close beside that of the Dakota leader, he whispered softly in his ear :

"The Long Knives are cunning dogs. White Raven will go and see that there are no thorns in the path of his brothers."

Before the Dakota could make any reply, he had sprung from his horse and glided out of sight. At first the suspicion that all was not right sprang into the mind of the crafty old warrior, but it was quickly allayed when in less than five minutes the Otse chief seemed to rise like a spirit from the ground beside him. A proud smile mantled the young warrior's haughty brow as he whispered, in a triumphant tone :

"The pale-faces are as sleepy as owls. White Raven could lay his hand on their scalps. The Great Spirit has given them into the hands of their enemies."

When Mal Buffalo thought a sufficient time had passed for White Raven's party to reach their position, he set out on his march. A short time more and he could satiate his desire for revenge on the ears of his people, the Nameless Hunter. Not even the slaughter of the trappers was deemed so important as the capture of the scourge of his tribe. To prevent any thing like failure, he himself would lead the party and act as scout. Sliding forward with the silence of a shadow, his glittering eyes scanned every spot that would be likely to shelter a foe. Not an object but was thoroughly examined as he advanced.

After several hours' march the welcome sight of a camp-fire was dimly seen in the distance. Mal Buffalo halted until his band came up. Pointing to the beacon that was to guide them on their mission of carnage, he said, in a low, exulting

tone, while a smile of malignant ferocity distorted his hideous countenance :

" See ! The cursed pale-face dogs have made a fire to burn their own carcasses ! The Long Knives think each is a Wacoudah for wisdom. Will the man of the mixed blood (Casteronix,) laugh and spit on the Dacotah fools when his hands are severed and he roasts at the stake ?"

Onward moved the silent band. Fate seemed to smile upon them. Wild passions burned in the breast of each warrior like a hissing cauldron. Nearer and nearer they drew to the thicket. Not a sound or sign showed the least vigilance on the part of the trappers.

When within less than sixty yards of the grove, Mad Buffalo made a sign for his warriors to hold back. Gliding forward to a tree, in a few seconds he was perched high among the branches where he could overlook the camp. Who can depict the ferocious joy that glowed in the breast of the Dacotah as he gazed upon his unconscious and hated foe ! Stretched out at the butt of a tree, and fast asleep, lay the being he hated and feared most on earth.

For full five minutes he feasted his eyes upon his prey. No miser ever gazed with such rapture upon his hoarded gold as did Mad Buffalo upon the human prey before him.

Descending with the agility of a mountain cat, he once more placed himself at the head of his warriors.

Presently the howl of a wolf vibrated on the silent air. Almost instantaneously the same cry was echoed from the upper end of the thicket.

Once more the Dacotah chief placed his hand to his mouth. This time it was no bark of a wolf that was heard : it was a sound far more fearful ! It was the war-cry of the Dacotahs ! A hundred throats echoed back the ominous signal !

Whirling his tomahawk high above his head, Mad Buffalo sprung for the thicket, closely followed by his infuriated band.

Why do they halt in their mad career ? Why those yells of disappointment ? High on the midnight air arose a shout more wild, more terrific, than that of the Dacotahs. It was the war-whoop of the Ishmaelites of the plains, the Pawnee Loups !

Another sound was not wanting, to add more terror to the scene. It was the whiplike crack of a score of rifles, that carried certain death with them.

Great as was their terror and dismay—for they knew neither the number nor position of the foe—the Dacotahs never once thought of giving way. Shouting his fearful battle-cry, M. I. B. B. once more sprung for the thicket to dislodge the enemy. He had not far to go to find them. As if by magic, from every bush and brake sprung forth Pawnee and pale-face, fighting as brothers, side by side.

The deadly strife was not confined to one spot. From the upper end of the thicket came shouts of mortal combat. High above the din of battle could be heard the clarion voice of Wild Antelope as he cheered his warriors on. Seeing the disadvantage of carrying on the contest in two separate parties, the Dacotahs allowed themselves to be driven back until they were reunited, when the battle raged more fiercely than ever.

Foremost in the fight strode the Nameless Hunter, dealing death to all that came within his reach. Close behind were the trappers, whose rifles made fearful havoc among the unyielding Dacotahs.

One Dacotah, a warrior of powerful stature, wishing to render himself forever renowned in the traditions of his people, determined that the scourge of his tribe should perish by his hand. Shouting his terrible war-whoop, he rushed upon the Nameless Hunter, just as the latter was after crashing in the skull of one of his foes with the butt of his rifle. Although taken at a disadvantage, he successfully warded off the blow aimed at his head. Quick as thought, he dropped his rifle and seized both arms of his powerful antagonist. The next moment he had wrenched the tomahawk that was red with the blood of more than one Pawnee, from his grasp, and then shouted, in a voice of fury:

"Dac, dog of a Dacotah! Ye have fought yer last battle!" The tomahawk descended and split his skull in twain. "Come on, ye out-throat devils," he shouted; "I'm the Scourge of the Dacotahs!"

Few indeed were those who wanted to accept his challenge.

Where the battle raged fiercest, there was Mad Buffalo, animating his almost panic-stricken warriors. At last, seeing that it was useless to continue a conflict so unequal, he sounded his war-whistle for retreat.

In another minute the Dacotahs were flying down the valley for their horses, closely followed by the victorious Pawnees and trappers. After the pursuit had continued for some distance, the Nameless Hunter warned his friends against following any further. That Mad Buffalo would endeavor to draw them into an ambush was certain. It would have been well for some of them if they had followed his advice, but, so elate were they with their victory, that a number of them continued the pursuit. Among these were Casteronix, Jerome Allen, and Alf Foster. The consequence was that they were ambushed in a small brake, were overpowered and hurried to the front of the flying Dacotahs!

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND SON!

ALTHOUGH the Dacotahs had lost near half their band, in killed and wounded, the victory was not a bloodless one to the Pawnees. They had lost several warriors of note, besides a great many wounded—the most important of whom was the renowned Santalanta, head chief of the Pawnee Loups.

When the Nameless Hunter and Wild Antelope returned from the pursuit, they were met by Bonte, whose countenance plainly indicated that he was the bearer of evil tidings.

"Chief of the Pawnees," he began, "I'm sorry to say I've bitter words fur yer ears."

"Let my white father say on. Wild Antelope knows that the Wacondah sometimes hides his face behind the clouds," was the stoical reply.

"The great chief Santalanta is badly wounded. We've examined his wounds an' I'm almostartin he'll never see another sunrise; he's been aquirin' fur ye fur some time."

In the center of the camp, surrounded by his warriors, lay Santaluta, with his blanket thrown over his shoulders. Beside him lay his pipe, knife and tomahawk, and all his other weapons of war.

By a mighty effort, that did not betray the pain he suffered, the old chief raised himself to a sitting posture, as soon as the Nameless Hunter and Will Antelope made their appearance, and in a voice as cheerful as he could assume, began to address them :

"Santaluta is glad to see the Antelope and the white chief. The chief of the Pawnee Loups is going on the dark path ; his sun is setting behind the clouds. The Wacondah calls him ; he must go. Let the chiefs and warriors gather round, that they may hear the words that fall from his lips before he sets out on his long journey through the dark valley that lies in the path of every true warrior, on his way to the happy fields of his people. Chiefs and warriors, need I tell you that, many seasons ago, Santaluta went out alone on the war-path of the treacherous Dacotah ? The scalps of five warriors hung at his belt. For three days he kept them on his trail, although badly wounded with an arrow. At last Santaluta thought that his time had come to depart for the blessed prairie. But just as he would die a pale-face found Santaluta and treated him as a brother, until he was able to take the home path. Did he let him depart empty-handed ? No ! The great Medicine fire-weapon was in his hands !

"Four moons had not passed when Santaluta was once more on the war-path of the cat-throats. In their very villages we struck them. In the wigwam of a chief, Santaluta found a boy. It was the son of his pale-face brother !

"The Wacondah whispered in his ear, 'Take the boy back to his father.'"

The powerful arm of the Nameless Hunter became terribly agitated with a sudden emotion. But, well acquainted with the propensities of the Indian race, he forbore to ask any questions of the dying chief. This agitation of the hunter did not escape the quiet eye of Santaluta. He hastened to conclude :

"When Santaluta reached the spot where his white

brother's cabin stood, no cabin was there. The treacherous Dacotah had burned it to the ground."

"My son! my son! what became of him?" screamed the Nameless Hunter, no longer able to control his feelings.

"White chief of the Pawnees," said Santalanta, slowly, as if he was gathering his last breath for some final effort, "*there* stands your son, the War-eagle of the Pawnee Loups!"

"Wild Antelope the son of BALT WALTERS?" yelled Bonte, with a look of awe and astonishment.

"Yes, Henri Bonte, I *am* Balt Walters, and no longer the Nameless Hunter, for I've found my boy whom I never expected to see on this earth."

The situation of the dying chief for the moment banished every other thought. It was evident that the moments of Santalanta were fast drawing to a close. A wild luster shone in his eyes. By a mighty effort he raised himself to his feet, and in a voice as clear and as distinct as in days of old, he shouted the Pawnee battle-cry, and with it still trembling upon his lips he fell into the open arms of Wild Antelope, who gently lowered him to the earth. The spirit of Santalanta had fled to him who gave it.

As soon as the last sad offices for the dead had been performed, Wild Antelope held a council with his friends in regard to their future operations. It was conceded by all that no effort should be spared for the rescue of their three friends, for well all knew their fate if once they reached the villages of the Dacotahs. Death in its most frightful forms—death by every torture known to the sanguinary minds of their savage captors!

It was further agreed, before the council broke up, that the goods of the trappers should be cached in some safe place, while the women and those warriors who were so badly wounded as to render them unable to go on the war-path, should set out for the nearest village.

Before the sun had cast his first ray above the earth, the place that had witnessed the scenes we have described, was tenanted only by the dead.

All that day did they follow on the plain trail. It was

only when the darkness of night rendered the path no longer visible, that Wild Antelope reluctantly ordered a halt to rest his weary band.

Having finished their frugal supper, Wild Antelope held a short council with his father and Bonte—the result of which was that the young chief declared his intention to set out alone on the trail, promising to return before it would be time for them to start on the following morning.

After the departure of the young chief on his lonely and most dangerous mission, guards were thrown out to ward off any attempted surprise by the wily Dacotah.

A short distance from the place of encampment, by the side of a rapid stream, there grew some low bushes. There Bonte had taken his stand, with a few of his friends, as it was the direction from whence the enemy would be most likely to approach, if they came at all.

The night, too, was such as the savage loves for his bloody enterprises. Banks of dark clouds covered the whole face of the heavens; not even the glimmer of a solitary star was to be seen.

Slowly the time passed. It could not have been far from midnight; more than one of those on guard began to show signs of succumbing to the influence of sleep, when a Pawnee, who was one of the party, lightly touched the arm of Bonte and pointed significantly down the stream.

"Are the ears of my white father open?"

"They are, but ye may shoot me if I ken hear even the chirp of an insect."

"Here is the same, and my ears are none of the duldest," said one of the trappers.

Dropping himself of his blanket, the Pawnee disappeared from view before they suspected his intention.

A quarter of an hour might have passed when their ears were greeted with the sound of a scuffle in the stream some distance below them, presently followed by a smothered shriek and the splash of some heavy body in the stream.

A few seconds after, the Pawnee stood before them with a bloody scalp in his belt. He resumed his blanket and place just as calmly as if nothing unusual had happened.

"That's another devil's which wiped out," said a trapper.

"And it might 'a' been one of ourselves only for the sharpness of your ears, Pawnee."

"The cut-throat was a fool. He thought that a Pawnee had no ears," replied the Indian, scornfully.

"I don't know how it is," the trapper continued, "I have seen hundreds of whites who could see farther than any red-skin, but when ye come to ears there is as much difference between them as there is in the eyes of an owl and an eagle in sunlight. I know it, for I have seen it myself in a little bit of an adventure I once had a hand in."

"Then let's hear it," said Bonte; "it will help to keep the sleep out of our eyes."

Without any further preface, the trapper began:

"It must be nigh onto ten years ago, myself and a Huron warrior of the name of Wis-ka-go-twa, or the man that can hear well, were employed by the Hudson Bay Company as hunters to a brigade whose tramping grounds were in the neighborhood of the Hill of the Meadows. One morning we set out together for a day's hunt, on the forks of the Ottertail river. After tramping around a good bit we thought that we would build a fire and have something to eat. In a short time we had half a dozen prairie hens spitted over the hot coals. Having finished our feed, we war just on the point of lighting our pipes when the Huron made me a sign to keep still."

"What's up, Wis?" said I.

"Find out soon," he replied, walking away for some distance and placing his ear to the ground. In a few minutes he came back and informed me, 'Canoe full of warriors on the water,' he said, jerking his hand toward a lake that lay full two miles away.

"I guess, Wis," said I, laughing, 'you hear better this mornin' than you ever did in your life.'

"May laugh," said the Huron, a kind of mad; 'Wis-ka-go-twa's tongue is not forked. It speak true. He holds the dip of the paddles in the water.'

"That's more than I can say," I replied, in the same strain, thinking him on the brag, for when a Huron is on that trail he's *thar*.

"Will find out by an' by," he returned, firmly; 'if Wis-

ka-go-twa's words are not true he will go and live with the Huron squaws.'

"I knew very well if he was right the sooner we 'put' the better for ourselves. Collecting a lot of green branches, we soon had as big a smoke as ever came from the camp-fire of a greenhorn.

"In place of running away in a contrary direction, we put as fast as our legs could carry us toward a small grove of cottonwoods that lay about half-way between our fire and the lake. In a short time we war perched among the branches of the tallest tree. Ten minutes might have passed and I began to think what a darned fool Wis-ka-go-twa had made of me. I felt a kind of riled over it, and said to him: 'Won't the Huron squaws laugh when they see the warrior that bears so well put on petticoats?' The Huron grasped my arm and pointed to the edge of the grove, about two hundred yards below where we were concealed. I looked, and saw a sight that made me hold on to the branches with a firmer grip. There was ten as fierce-looking, war-painted devils as ever flung a tomahawk.

"'Blackfeet!' said I, in the ear of my companion. A nod of his head was sufficient to inform me that I was right.

"For five minutes the Indians stood on the edge of the grove, making all sorts of signs toward where the smoke was rising in a black column.

"In a short time five of the skunk started off so as to get on the other side of the fire, while the other five crept cautiously forward, so as to completely surround it.

"As soon as it was safe for us to put, we slid down and at once struck off on the back foot of their trail to the lake, where we had no trouble in finding their canoe.

"The Huron and myself held a short council; the result of it was that we determined to turn the tables upon the painted devils. As luck would have it, we had a small canoe and fishing lines but not quite a mile away; so we tramped along the beach to it and in a short time we put out into the lake and began to fish. About an hour after, the painted devils made their appearance; they at once put on toward us, making every sign of friendship, just as if we were fools enough to trust ourselves in their power!

"Finding we were not to be bamboozled, they went to the paddles with all their might.

"This was just what we wanted, for we knew that part of the brigade was on the opposite side of the lake, and I would like to take a hand in a skirmish. We pretended to be getting away from them as fast as possible. At that time I owned a rifle that could send a bullet and draw a death-shriek from any red-skin fully a hundred yards farther than any weapon I have ever seen. When they got within what range I was sure the rifle could carry, I raised the weapon to fire. Oh, Lord! if ye war only to hear them! There was not a name from a cowardly dog of a pale-face to a dirty squaw that they didn't call us. One nasty critter even stood up in the canoe and presented a certain part of his body as a target. He did not stand long before I sent a little messenger that changed his music. He gave one spring in the air and landed in the water, dead meat. Ye may be sure that the death of their companion made the Blackfeet more determined to capture us.

"Well, the fact is that, before we reached the other side of the lake, which was about four miles wide, I succeeded in wiping out three more of the red heathen. Just as we neared the bank, the Huron gave several grunts of satisfaction. I knew that he had discovered our friends. The canoe was run ashore, and we darted into the undergrowth that grew on the bank. Close behind us came the Blackfeet, totally unaware of what was in store for them. When within less than fifty yards of the bank more than a dozen rifles were discharged, and when the smoke cleared away there was not a Blackfoot but was wiped out."

"Ah!" The speaker suddenly brought his rifle to his shoulder. The weapon was lowered almost immediately, when a well-known voice hailed them. The next moment Wild Antelope stood before the little group.

"Has the War-eagle of the Pawnee Loups seen the Dacotah dogs?" asked Bonte, as soon as the young chief took his place beside him.

"He has. Mad Buffalo thinks he can blind the eyes of the Pawnees."

"Then you think he'll return and attack us to-night?"

"The Dakotas are fools; they know not the Pawnees of the Leap. The Dakota chief has sent the captives to his village. Two hours from now Mad Buffalo will come; he thinks our warriors know not the color of a Sioux scalp," said the young brave, with a smile of significant meaning.

The whole camp was at once aroused and posted so as to give their expected visitors a warm welcome.

About an hour after midnight several dark objects were seen creeping cautiously toward the camp.

Just at the moment when Mad Buffalo began to gloat, a second time, over his prey, an incident transpired which dashed his high hopes. A young Dakota chief, burning to revenge a brother killed on the previous night, was conducting a small party to the opposite side of the camp. His evil destiny brought him directly where Balt Walters was posted. His first consciousness of danger was when he was grasped by the tatted scalp-lock and a knife driven up to the hilt between his shoulders. A wild shriek of agony pealed through the forest—the death wail of the young savage. Mad Buffalo at once realized that, instead of surprising his enemies, he had fallen himself into a trap. Springing to their feet, with shouts and yells they rushed for the camp, but had not taken a dozen paces when a volley of bullets was poured into them, causing many a Dakota to bite the dust. Seeing how useless it would be to continue a contest with an enemy armed with rifles, Mad Buffalo shouted for his warriors to retreat, and never was an order more willingly obeyed. The next moment they were flying in every direction, each seeking his own safety.

Wild Antelope, seeing that nothing could be gained by pursuing, wisely let them go without any further molestation.

"Mad Buffalo will not call soon again, to visit the Pawnee camp," said he, with a bright smile.

"By my soul he won't!" shouted a trapper, joyfully. "May he always be as well treated! There will be a high old time of it when he gets home. Nay a tuft of hair to show that near half his band wiped out! Kaw-kaw!"

"Come, men, we should remember that, although we have whipped the Dakotas, three of our friends are in their power,"

said Balt Walters, a little sternly. "If we are to try and save them, no time is to be lost."

"Right, Balt," responded Bonte; "it makes me shudder when I think of their situation. I can never show my face to Mr. Allen if any thing happens to Jerome."

CHAPTER X.

THE HALF-BREED'S ORATION.

ABOUT a week after the events recorded in the previous chapter, a wild scene was presented to view. Instead of rolling prairies, vast hills and forest confined the gaze far to the north and west. The spot that claims our attention most, is a large valley, five or six miles wide by perhaps fifteen miles in length. Through its center rolled a broad, shallow water-course. For the distance of two or three hundred yards on both sides of this river there could be counted over two hundred Indian lodges. These were constructed of buffalo-skins, with the fleshy side outward. By the rude devices painted in many-colored clays, the rank and standing of the owner of each lodge was designated. Suspended from a light pole in front of the skin door was the bow, lance, shield, and arrows of each warrior.

Any one thoroughly acquainted with the different tribes of the west, would see at once that there was a slight dissimilarity in the general appearance of the parties on the two sides of the river. Those on the right bank were Dakotas, while the others were known as the Assiniboina, or Stone-throwers—a fierce and powerful branch of the Sioux nation.

Something of unusual interest was, evidently, about to transpire on the Dakota side of the stream, where the warriors of both bands were collected in front of the largest lodge, which was the council-house of the tribe.

Conspicuous above all assembled there was Moll Buffalo, dressed in his great medicine robe of painted buffalo-skin. For every chief or warrior he had a word of praise or flattery;

for the wily Dacotah well knew that his late disasters had lowered his influence with some of the most renowned warriors. Even presents were given to some of the oldest and most famous braves of the tribe, to regain their favor. It was near the close of day before every thing was ready for the council to proceed.

At a sign from Mal Buffalo, half a dozen warriors darted into a lodge close by, and presently appeared dragging our three friends, Val Cisteronix, Foster, and Jerome Allen, between them. The dejected looks of the two latter showed plainly that they knew what was in store for them; but the countenance of the first bore a look of hatred and defiance that he did not try to conceal. In fact, whenever he caught the eye of a Dacotah upon him, a fiendish smile would mantle his dark-hued countenance.

As soon as the captives were brought into the center, an old warrior arose and began speaking as follows:

"The first pine on the hills was only bursting from the ground when On-quasheng went on his first war-path. What his tongue says his eyes have seen. Now listen to the words of a brave whose hand has struck the Pawnee and pale-face. Since the snows begin to melt on the mountains, the Sioux has found the Pawnee on his war-path. When the panther finds the fawn, does he lie down and caress it? No! As the bear loves honey so does the Dacotah love the Pawnee and the pale-face. The Dacotah loves them, to drink their blood! The Dacotah is a springing conger—the pale-face a trembling deer. If any of On-quasheng's words have fallen to the ground, let the young braves pick them up; they are full of wisdom. On-quasheng has spoken."

A loud yell showed how well they understood the drift of his advice, and meant to follow it.

The next speaker arose very slowly, and looked around as if he felt that he was unworthy to speak before them. He began:

"I am only a boy! I have always lived with the squaws. If my hair is turning white, it is not because I am getting old, but because the snows that fall upon it while on the war-path of the Pawnee and Upsarika have not melted yet." Suddenly changing his voice to a tone of lofty pride, he continued:

"Now look at me! Is there a scar on my back? That is a part of my body which an Otoe, Upsaroka, Osage, or a dog of a Pawnee never saw! Warriors of the Sioux nation, look upon this face, this breast, and tell what you see! Scars! What am I? A Dacotah! What is my name? No Heart! Did I ever show mercy to an enemy? Go ask the Kansas, Pawnees and Long Knives! No Heart has spoken. Let the Dacotahs think well of his words."

Mad Buffalo was the next speaker. Fierce was the look he cast upon the captives as he arose to his feet.

"Who is Mad Buffalo?" he commenced, looking around. "A warrior who has seen many things."

"Ba-a-a!" came from Casteronix.

"He knows a coward from a brave."

"The devil he does!" shouted Val.

"When Mad Buffalo first struck the Pawnee he was only a young brave. What is he now?"

"A squaw!" answered the prisoner.

"A chief of the renowned Dacotahs! Mad Buffalo has struck the warriors of every nation."

"In a horn!" responded the half-breed.

"Who will dare to go before him into the hunting-grounds of the Pawnees? The Pawnees are cowards."

"You're a liar!"

"They have brought a band of Long Knives to fight their battles, and drive the Dacotahs from the hunting grounds. Cast your eyes around and tell me what you see."

"Yer see men, ye dirty dogs!" howled Val, "if yer look this way."

"I will tell you; I have brought some of the Long Knives that my people may look upon the friends of the Pawnees." With a devilish smile he slowly pointed his finger at the prostrate form of Valois Casteronix, and asked: "Do any of my people know that wolf's whelp of mixed blood?"

"The whelp of a hog are you, you beast!" fairly snarled Val.

In an instant fifty knives and tomahawks were lifted with the intention of hacking the audacious captive to bits; but Mad Buffalo and a few of the old warriors repressed their fury; other means of death had they reserved for the whites.

Order having been restored, Mad Buffalo resumed:

"Shall we forget the warriors who went out to chase the buffaloes and never returned? No; we will send the two pale-faces and the dog of mixed blood after them, to carry their burdens across the dark valley. When the sun has twice gone round the earth, and the warriors are all called in, the fire-torture shall begin. Mad Buffalo has said it, and is he not chief of the Dacotahs?"

Amid the wildest yells Mad Buffalo sat down.

Although Foster and Jerome Allen did not understand a word spoken, too well they knew its purport, from the conduct of the savages and the fierce retorts of Casteronix, who was as untamable, apparently, as a rattlesnake.

"Now, boys," he said to his companions, "it seems we're to go under if nothing turns up; but, afore I peg out, I'll just try an' see if I ken sweeten thar timpers a bit. May I be singed and roasted the next minute if I don't make 'em wish they warn't Dacotahs."

As soon as the boisterous approbation that had greeted the crazy chief had in some degree subsided, Casteronix informed an old warrior who sat near him that he had some words to say of importance for the Dacotahs to hear. This the warrior immediately reported to the council, whereupon one of the savages cut the thongs that confined his feet, and the half-breed arose. Glancing about him with a look of grim delight, he commenced:

"What's a Dacotah?" he asked, casting a savage look around. "I'll tell ye! A Dacotah is a thief that'll steal from a squaw—a hunter who has to beg for the meat he knows not how to catch. In battle a Dacotah is a deer, that knows how to use his legs. The Dacotahs are a nation of squaws." Posing that his words might have their full effect, he resumed: "If the Dacotahs want to see a nation of warriors let them go out an' seek for the Pawnees or Long Knives on the prairie. A Pawnee is a spinning panther—a Dacotah a crawling snake. Who ken count the Dacotah skulls in the holes of Wini Antelope?" Several young braves spring to their feet and with loud yells rushed at the half-breed. His life would have paid for his boldness on the instant were it not that several old warriors surrounded the

speaker and shielded his body with their own persons. They could not help admiring the courage of the man who bearded them in their own camp.

"The words of the mixed man are bitter," said one old chief. "He won't speak so boastingly when a *Dacotah* fire burns his flesh. He speaks without thinking."

"Won't I?" thundered Casteronix, defiantly. "Ye may roast me an' eat me arter if I don't." Then raising his voice wildly until it could be heard all over the camp, he yelled: "Who is the chief of the *Dacotahs*? I'll tell ye; a coward, who's lost his skulp-lock. The *Dacotahs* are dogs; their chief is only a squaw! The man of mixed blood laughs at ye."

Like a famished tiger bounding on its prey, so did Mad Buffalo spring to his feet. Whirling his tomahawk high above his head, he cast the weapon with all his might at the head of the half-breed. Casteronix dexterously flung himself to the earth, and the weapon, sent with such vengeful force, went whirling far away, striking the ground many rods from the hand that flung it.

Amid the wildest shouts and yells for their blood, the three captives were dragged back to the prison-lodge, and a guard placed to watch them until they were led forth to be tortured.

"What the devil got into you, Casteronix?" asked Jerome Allen, soon after the captives were left to themselves. "Don't you think our situation is bad enough without farther irritating our savage captors?"

"Do ye think, Master Jerome," replied the half-breed, with a malicious grin, "I war a-going to let them bloody cut-throat dogs hev all the boasting to 'emselves? No! no! Val Casteronix has too much *Huron* blood in his veins for that! I war bound to let 'em hear something they didn't like, an' I did. I'll do it ag'in if I git the chance—they may roast me fur a skunk if I don't."

"That's something I think ye won't git, or my name isn't Alf Foster. By my son, I thought we war文明ment when the infernal imps made the rush for us. For my part, I would rather go under than be sizzled at the stake, 'specially the way them 'll do it."

"It's time enough to croak when the time comes, an' when it does, all we've to do is to go under like men," retorted the half-breed, doggedly. "I've been in as bad fixes afore now, an' got out of 'em, as I hope to git out of this."

"I see nothing to hope for," responded young Allen, dejectedly. "It's almost an impossibility for our friends to render us any assistance."

"That's whar ye're wrong, Master Jerome. I'll stake this skulp of mine ag'inst a beaver-trap that Wild Antelope an' his band aren't far away this present moment. Even if he war, do ye think that the Nameless Hunter an' our own friends won't desert us? No, boys, the Dacotahs hev'n't roasted us yet, an' I 'spect that Val Casteronix knows a thing or two."

"I trust in heaven you may prove a true prophet, Val," said Allen, a little more hopefully. "I must certainly say I have no love to die the death of a martyr, just at present. Of all deaths, dying at the stake is least to my liking."

"Wal, boy, I don't see no signs of sizzling yit, an' I more nor suspicion we won't, kase why—I think Val Casteronix has a friend, or may be two, on the other side of the river."

"Who are the friends? Why don't ye spit it out, man?" said Foster, somewhat provoked at the cool indifference of the half-breed.

"Wal, boys, did either of ye notice a most splendiferous gal among the crowd of Dacotah squaws?"

"We did," replied both his companions together.

"For my part," said Foster, "when I first saw 'er, I'd sw'ar it war the Wild Antelope in petticoats. Who knows but it may be so?"

"That ye're wrong, comrade. It's a cl'ar woman."

"I must say the similarity struck me," responded young Jerome Allen. "Do you know her, Val?" he asked, anxiously.

"I sh'd think I do! I onct saved 'er life from a panther, an' I 'spect she can't forget it, either."

"Then why don't ye tell us at onct, an' not be beating about the bush?" said Foster, annoyed at the tantalizing manner of Casteronix.

"Wal, the gal is Allulia, the queen of the Assinibolias. She has more influence among the warriors of the Stone eaters

nor any chief of the tribe. Many's the varmint she's helped to git out of thar clutches. It's nigh onto five years since I first saw 'er, an' here is how it happened: One day I war out looking arter some traps I'd set. In crossing a heavy timber bottom, I heard a loud scream, such as ken only come from the throat of a skemale whin in danger. Dashing toarst where the scream came from, I soon came in sight of a young gal, who stood like one in a trance, wid her eyes fixed on some object in a tree, only a few yards distant. It didn't take this varmint long to diskiver what war up. Perched on the lower branch of the tree war a large panther, watching the gal. I saw by the way he war crouching down that he war getting ready fur a spring. Taking a good, quick skwint along the sights fur the varmint's eye, I fired. Ye may shoot me if I c'u'd tell whether the gal or the panther war most frightened. I know she flopped down in a heap, an' so did the blasted man-chawer. I tell ye, boys, it war a sight to see that reptile jump about wid half his head blown to atoms. May I be singed if I didn't think the lovely young gal would hug me to death whin she come to 'erself. She told me she knew she war of white parents, an' it war easy to see that she hadn't a drop of Injin blood in 'er. The upshot war that we often met an' would talk fur hours on the stretch. Fur a long time thar warn't a thing that took place among the Stone-eaters but I knew. Many a varmint would lose his ha'r, only fur the timely warning of Alzulia, queen of the Stone-eaters."

Suddenly the voice of Casteronix became silent. The next moment the skin door of the lodge was thrust aside, and Mad Buffalo stood before them, with a smile of triumph on his swarthy countenance. Not a word escaped his lips as he examined the corls that confined Jerome Allen and Foster. A look that a fiend might envy mantled his bronze brow, as his eyes met those of the half breed. Spurning him with his foot, he broke out:

"Ha! ha! who laughs now? When the sun rises the body of a dog shall be a mark for the Dacotah boys to fire their arrows at."

The eye of Casteronix lit up with a flame of ferocious exultation, as he calmly lisssed between his teeth:

"Let the Dacotah cowards go look for Jeshamah; his skulp

hangs at the belt of a Pawnee! Where is Swift-foot? His bones are whiter nor the teeth of the wolf that picked 'em! When the children of the Black Eagle ask for their father, what does the skulpiess chief of the beggarly Dacotahs tell 'em? Go! go! the man of mixed blood has lived among warriors. Go; *I smell a Dacotah!*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUEEN.

For several minutes Mad Buffalo stood as if rooted to the ground. Revenge, with all its kindred passions, was at work within his savage breast. Several times did his fingers close upon the handle of his knife. He knew that to kill his victim on the spot, would be to rob himself of the pleasure of seeing him die by inches at the fiery stake.

"Is Mad Buffalo a fool?" he said, aloud, "that the bitter words of a dog should make him forget himself? He shall die, and his shrieks at the stake shall be music to the ears of the Dacotah chief."

Turning on his heel, he stalked out, leaving the captives to their own bitter reflections.

About an hour or more after the departure of the chief, if any one had stood a short distance from the lodge where our three friends were confined, they might notice a small, dark object that looked like a log of wood, lying on the ground. If your eyes had been fixed upon it long enough, perhaps you might have thought otherwise, for the object, whatever it was, had moved considerably nearer the lodge than when first you saw it.

Three minutes later it had disappeared altogether without your being much the wiser of what it might have been.

Had you maintained your vigil a quarter of an hour longer, your patience would be rewarded by seeing the same mysterious object issue from a rent in the back of the lodge where the three captives were confined. It was alone no longer;

three other beings, but different in appearance, followed close behind.

No serpent ever glided over its stony path with less noise than did those four mysterious beings creep through the Dacotah camp. The last lodge was left some distance behind when the whole four suddenly assumed an erect posture. Then your doubts as to their identity would be removed; three of them were men, but the fourth, a young and lovely girl, whose dress and ornaments proclaimed her the favorite child of some renowned chief of the Assiniboin.

After carefully following their lovely conductor for some distance they soon found themselves at the river. From beneath the sedge bank of the stream she drew forth a small and beautiful canoe.

"Dad rot ye, hev'n't things turned out as I tould ye?" The voice was that of Casteronix, the half-breed. "The wool hasn't growed yit that's to sizzle the hide of this varmint, shoot me if it has!"

At a signal from their conductor, they were about to step into the canoe when the word, "*Hist*," spoken in the softest tones of woman's voice, arrested the movement. Instantly the whole party sank to the ground. Presently a light foot-fall was heard on the dead leaves. Casteronix and his two companions drew their knives. Woe betide the comer, if his purpose was hostile! Two minutes had not elapsed when the athletic form of an Indian warrior was seen cautiously approaching the spot where they lay. When within five yards of them the stranger halted; the floating canoe had caught his eye; a low exclamation of delight escaped his lips.

"By heavens, it's Wild Antelope!" said young Allen, springing to his feet. "I would know his voice among a thousand."

"My brother has the ear of a Pawnee," was the welcome response.

The next moment their hands were grasped in those of the Pawnee chief. As the service of the canoe was not required, it was run back under the bank and they started down the stream. They had not gone very far when, at a signal from the Pawnee chief, they found themselves surrounded by friends.

Great was their surprise to see Wild Antelope return so soon, accompanied by the captives. But, greater was their surprise when informed by Casteronix of the rank of their deliverer, for there were but few trappers or Indians of the time who had not heard of Aleulia, the Assiniboin's Queen. Many a glance of admiration was cast upon the lovely stranger. None paid more silent or grateful homage than young Jerome Allen.

Words can but feebly express the astonishment of Allen, Foster and the half-breed when informed of the relationship that existed between Wild Antelope and the Nameless Hunter.

During the brief and hurried explanations that took place, it was decided that they should immediately withdraw from the neighborhood, as they were far inferior in point of numbers to the combined bands of Dacotahs and Assiniboin's. They well knew that as soon as Mal Buffalo discovered his captives' escape, he would be in pursuit.

The Pawnee chief resolved to gain some mountain-pass where his want of numbers would be counteracted by his situation.

Would Aleulia go with them, or would she return to her Indian friends? was the question that Jerome Allen asked of himself a dozen times in half as many minutes. His anxiety was set at rest, when the brave young maiden declared her determination to cast her lot for the future with the people of her own race and kindred.

It was true, her influence over the fierce Assiniboin's was as great as that of any chief in the nation. She could roam where she liked without hindrance, but could she leave them when she wished? No! What could she expect her future lot to be? Eventually the favorite wife, among the many, of some savage chief. The opportunity she often sighed for had come at last, and she was not going to cast it from her.

Without any further loss of time they started for the place where they had left their horses in charge of a few young braves. When morning dawned, many a mile lay between them and the Dacotahs' camp.

All the following day and night passed and not a sign could be discovered that they were pursued. That very circumstance only served to put them more on their guard, for

they knew that Mad Buffalo would surely pounce upon them when the chances were in his favor. It was not far from the hour of noon, on the second day after the escape, when one of the scouts in advance returned with the alarming intelligence that a band of mounted Indians was approaching directly in their line of march.

"Well, Balt Walters, hev the infernal cut-throats outwitted us arter all?" asked Bonte, in a tone of surprise.

"Outwitted us? No, man! Mad Buffalo and his gang are ahind of us. Thar isn't a horse in the Dacotah country that could have got ahead of us at the speed we've been going since we've started; mark my words, you will find them some hunting-party, but whether friends or foes I can not tell. What has my son to say?" he asked, with a look of fond pride beaming in his manly countenance as he asked the question.

"My father has struck too many Dacotahs to learn wisdom from Wild Antelope," modestly returned the young chief. "The Dacotah is not a bird to fly in the air. Wild Antelope would choose a camp and prepare to meet the comers."

"By my soul, I think ye're right, chief. Thar's nothing like a good stout log or a rock in front of ye, whin dealing wid' the cussed imps," said Bonte, approvingly.

It was fortunate for them that the country through which they were passing was very hilly and intersected in several directions by deep and narrow glens. A spot was chosen that just suited their purpose well. The whole party set to work with right good will, and in a short time had thrown up a strong breastwork of logs and rocks, from behind which they could pour a destructive fire if attacked.

When every thing was fixed to their satisfaction, Wild Antelope set out afoot to reconnoiter the approaching party.

Taking every advantage that the ground afforded, it was not long before the Pawnee chief gained a position where he could observe the coming band without being seen himself.

What caused the proud and joyous smile to mantle the noble countenance of the brave young chief?

In the approaching Indians Wild Antelope recognized, while yet more than a mile away, a hunting-party of his own warriors.

How his breast heaved with martial pride as his eagle eye glanced proudly on the wild and warlike appearance of the band as they came bounding over the long undulations! Waiting until the foremost warrior was within less than a hundred yards, Wild Antelope sprung from his concealment.

If a thunderbolt had dropped in their midst, the Pawnee band could not have been more surprised than at this sudden appearance of their chief. The air was rent with their shouts of joy.

We will not attempt to describe the undisguised satisfaction experienced by every member of the party at this welcome addition to their number. Now they had no anxiety as to the result, if attacked by Mad Buffalo.

As soon as it was sufficiently dark, Balt Walters, Castor-onix and a ranger, took the back foot of their own trail as the most likely direction to find any signs. The Nameless Hunter kept company with them only for a short distance, when he struck off in another direction. For several hours he kept on through hill and valley, without seeing any thing to excite his suspicion.

Just as he was about to retrace his way, the snapping of a dry stick smote his ear. Walters instantly sunk to the earth, and glided with noiseless motion for the shelter of a tree, that lay prostrate near at hand. Ten minutes might have passed, when the hunter cautiously raised his head. As he did so, the glowing eyes and hideous countenance of a savage confronted him.

Simultaneously did they spring to their feet. The heaving breast, distended nostrils, and eyes that burned with hateful passion, showed plainly of the love that they bore for each other.

"I am Red Wolf, whose shirt is covered with the scalps of the Long Knives!" shouted the savage, with a triumphant yell.

"The devil ye are!" retorted Walters, with a grim smile of satisfaction. "then, Mr. Red Wolf, I am glad to meet ye, for *I'm the Scourge of the Dakotahs!*"

"Then die, accursed Long Knife! The war-whoop of the Dakotahs shall be the last sound you hear on earth," screamed the savage, as he sprung upon the trunk of the tree and aimed a

deadly blow at the head of Walters, who, with wonderful celerity, warded off the stroke, and the next moment the tomahawk was wrenched from the warrior's grasp.

A frightful gleam of ferocity shot across the countenance of the hunter as he thundered:

"Die?—Yes, I know I'll die when my time comes, but not by the bite of a Dacotah. Away with you to the spirit-land, you murdering dog!"

Like lightning the tomahawk flashed in the starlight, and with a dull crash it cleft the skull of Red Wolf to the chin.

"Yes, when Balt Walters goes under it shall be at the order of my maker, not by the hand of a Dacotah," said the hunter, casting the bloody weapon far away in a clump of bushes. Flinging the body of the Indian into the hole made by the roots of the upturned tree, Walters resumed his ramble.

He had not gone more than half a mile, when a small column of smoke, rising above the tree-tops, met his eye, but the exact locality was hid from view by a high hill. Creeping forward, he soon gained the hill-top. Beneath him lay the camp of the Dacotahs and their friends the Assiniboins.

Balt was beginning to debate in his own mind whether he should not try and creep near, so as to learn what was going on, when he discovered two warriors coming directly toward his hiding-place. The watchful spy needed no information to tell him who they were. One was Mad Buffalo, and his companion was the war chief of the Assiniboins, a man of powerful frame and immense proportions.

As they slowly came up the hill they would stop every few steps, so earnest was their conversation. Gradually they drew nearer and nearer. Discovery seemed almost inevitable. In each hand the Nameless Hunter held a pistol, with his fingers on the triggers. Another step forward and the fate of the Dacotah chief and his companion would have been sealed. A few yards distant was a large, flat rock. With one mind both turned around and seated themselves upon it.

Although their conversation was in suppressed tones, very little escaped the ears of the hunter.

Suffice it to say that he learned that it was not the

intention of the Dakota chief to attack them in their present strong position. His purpose was to wait until he got them out on the open plains. His late experience had taught him a lesson he was not likely to forget, that behind their breast-works he had no chance against the fatal rifles of the trappers and their friends, the Pawnees.

Two other important facts he also learned at the same time. First, that the Sioux had discovered the part enacted by Aleukin in the liberation of their prisoners and her subsequent flight with the trappers. The next thing concerned himself. This was that more than a dozen Dakotas were out watching for him, on the very route taken by Casteronix and one of the rangers.

CHAPTER XII.

"AMY LEE! THOU ART AVENGED!"

WALTERS was not sorry when the two Indian chiefs arose and departed. For more than five minutes he stood leaning on his rifle in deep thought. He seemed undecided about something.

"I'll bet my life on it," he muttered to himself, "that that hot-headed half-breed'll be sure to run into some well-laid ambush of them 'ere throat-cutting devils. I'll just take a run down that way an' see if I can't find 'em."

Drawing his belt tighter around his body, Walters trailed his rifle and started off as lightly as a deer.

We will now take leave of him for a short time and see how it fared with Casteronix and his companion.

When Casteronix and Parks parted with the Nameless Hunter, they kept on the trail made by their own party in the morning. Knowing the route they had come, they experienced no difficulty in following it up. Mile after mile was traced behind them without seeing any thing to excite their suspicion. Both being inveterate smokers, they sat down and lit their pipes, and soon began to enjoy the soothing influence

of the kinne-kinck (an aromatic kind of tobacco held in great esteem by all the western tribes and trappers.)

Their low-toned conversation turned upon the escape of Casteronix and his two companions from the Dacotah camp.

"So ye think we'd a close pull fur it," said Casteronix, with a cunning grin, in reply to some previous remark of his companion.

"Sartinly I do. Mark my words, Val, my boy; if the imps ever lay hands on yer precious carcass, they'll roast ye in the highest style," replied Parks, with a smothered laugh.

"Wah! The thing 'll never come to pass, man. The red devils tried it onct, but didn't I play 'em a nice trick? Shoot me if I hev'n't to laugh whinever I think of that 'ere scrape!"

A smile of sarcastic humor flashed across his dark countenance, as he referred to the incident.

"I'll jest tell ye the sarcumstance in a few words. The year afore last I started up the country wid a party, arter pelts. Somehow the leader an' this varmint c'u'dn't agree, so I determined to leave 'em an' do a little trapping on my own hook. About a week arter I'd left 'em, I struck the north fork of the Platte. Seeing plenty of signs about, I determined to find a good place to roost, an' work the place. Not far from the bank of the river thar war a large grove of timber. It warn't long until I diskivered a large sycamore wid the heart all gone. Ye c'u'd see daylight up through it. I tell ye in a very short time I'd fixed it up slap bang. Whinever I wanted to hev a good skwint of the country, I used to climb up inside, and, perched among the branches, I c'u'd see what war a-going on far miles around. Fur over a month I'd a high old time of it among the beaver. Daring all the time not a sign of a red-skin did I see.

"Wal, one night, some time shortly arter I'd stretched my walkers, I thort I h'ard a light step outside. Jest as I war about to rise an' hev a skwint, what shoul I see but the blazing eyes of a blasted Sioux peeping in! As the place war dark, he c'u'dn't make me out. Not so this varmint, as his head war atween me an' the light.

"As I allers sleep wid my young shooters by my side, I'd no trouble in cautiously cocking one, an' before the war-painted

reptile knew any thing, I'd plugged one ov the red's peepers. I immediately sprung to my feet an' war about to make a rush for the timber outside, but I war suddenly brought to a stop. I war completely surrounded by a pack of screeching devils. One of 'em made a spring fur the opening, but my other small shooter spoke an' he fell a-top of the other. The rest of the imps at onct darted to kiver, as they s'posed thar war a lot of us inside. Ten minutes might have passed, an' thar warn't a stir outside. I knew very well that they war up to some of their deviltry, an' I warn't far out of my reckoning. In the mean time I'd foddered up all my shooters. In a short time the infernal imps of the devil had a pile of dry brushwood heaped up ag'inst the opening. 'Going to smoke me out, are ye?' ses I to myself. 'I only hope ye may git me, that's all.' In a short time the pile war lit an' lots of green branches heaped upon it. It warn't long afore big volumes of smoke began to fill the place, whin I thort it war time to be a-going. Jest in about the time it would take to lift a skulp, I war among the branches, the imps never suspecting that the sycamore war hollow all the way up. Making my way from the sycamore to another tree that war close by, I looked down on the brutes. Oh, Lord, it would do ye good to see them dancing about with delight, expectin' every minute to see us rush out. 'I'll gin ye a little music ye're not used to,' ses I to myself. Wid that I drew a bead on one big, ugly devil. Roast me if he didn't jump higher that time nor ever he did in his life. Afore the imps c'u'd git to kiver, I'd wiped out another."

Suddenly the voice of Casteronix was still, at a sign from his companion.

"Look, do you not see something moving in yonder bush?" whispered Parks in his ear.

"By heavens! I see the fiery eyes of a Dacotah as plain as I see you," returned the half-breed, and before the hand of his more cautious companion could hinder him, the rifle of Casteronix had sprung to his shoulder and vomited forth a jet of fire. The detonation was followed by an unearthly shriek. The next moment Casteronix was leveled to the earth by a blow, and Parks found himself surrounded by half a score of yelling Dacotahs. Like a flash of lightning the contents

of his rifle was poured into the breast of a warrior; then, as if by magic, the weapon was reversed in his hands, and like the arms of a wind-mill his weapon descended right and left upon the heads of his assailants, who seemed bent on capturing him alive if possible.

There was something heroic in the attitude of Parks as he stood with his left foot across the body of his companion, who was slowly returning to consciousness after the fearful blow he had received on the head from a war-club. Never for a moment did the bold ranger dream of leaving his friend.

One of the Dakotas determined that the scalp of the unfortunate half-breed should be his. Stealing behind he grasped Casteronix by the legs and began to drag him from between the feet of Parks, but at that moment the savage fell headlong beside the body of his intended victim, with a bullet through his brain. The next moment Balt Walters dashed in to the assistance of his friends!

Casteronix was now able to join his two companions, and in a short time not a Dakota was to be seen. They, thinking, when Walters made his appearance, that more of their party were at hand, ingloriously took to their heels, closely followed by the hunters, who soon succeeded in bringing down two more of them. Only three escaped to tell Mal Buffalo the fate of their comrades.

"Knock me stiff if that's not what I call doing the thing up to the handle," yelled Casteronix in savage glee, as he tore off the scalps of the dead and dying.

"Yes, and they were near doing for us, too," said Parks, in a voice devoid of any boasting. "Only for the timely assistance of Balt Walters, I think the scalps of one Bill Parks, and a certain coon called Val Casteronix, would ha' been in the keeping of the Dakotas. I'll swear to that, for I was almost played out."

"I don't think so, comrade," replied Walters, as he reloaded his weapons. "No man breathing could do more than you did, and there is the hand of Balt Walters on that." The rough hands of the two daring men met in a grasp that made them friends forever. "Come, boys," continued Walters, "let's hurry back to camp. I think I've a plan that if carried out right 'll place the Sioux at our mercy."

They at once set out for their camp, which they reached without any further incident.

But Walters, summoning all his friends around him, informed them of his intention of turning the tables on the Dakotas by surprising their camp.

The plan met the approbation of every one, and instant preparation was made to carry it out.

Leaving the horses in charge of a few sagacious braves, the rest of the party set out under the guidance of Walters, on their mission of vengeance. An hour before dawn they reached, undiscovered, the top of the hill from which they could see clearly the camp of their enemies, who slept soundly, little dreaming of the surprise that awaited them. Selecting fifty warriors, Walters crept away until he got around in the rear, thus completely cutting off retreat in that direction.

By the time that Walters' party gained their position day broke. How impatiently Wild Antelope and those with him awaited the signal that was to announce that all was ready for the work of destruction to begin! At last it came, a small column of smoke arose in the air, about a hundred yards from the camp of the unsuspecting Dakotas. The misty signal disappeared almost as suddenly as it had appeared.

What is the meaning of the wild, unearthly shout that made every Sioux spring to his feet? It was the fierce battle-cry of the Pawnee Loup!

The work of destruction began. It would be impossible to describe the scene that followed. Although taken by surprise, the combatants of Dakotas and Assinibons fought with the courage of desperation. Above the shouts of the combatants arose the voice of Mad Buffalo, animating his warriors and shouting his battle-cry, rushing to their aid whenever he found them giving way. He seemed to be gifted with a charmed life. More than one Pawnee was sent to his last moment, beneath the blows of his bloody tomahawk.

At last, in or near his view—one that brought in play all the wild and savage passions of his fierce nature. It was But Walters, the Squire of his race. Their endeavors to meet in mortal combat were disastrous; both were animated by the same feeling—the destruction of the other.

Years of burning hatred animated the breast of each. There were two others who had each resolved that by their hand alone the Dacotah chief should die; these were Wild Antelope and Valois Costeronix, the half-breed.

At the same moment each had cut through a living path to reach Mad Buffalo.

"Back! back! my son! Give way, Casteronix!" shouted Balt Walters, in wild frenzy. "Back, I say! Mad Buffalo is mine! By the wind that blows—by the eternal thunder and flashing lightning, Mad Buffalo is mine, and mine alone, and I have sworn it years ago. For this hour have I lived, for this have I spared his life over and over again. No hand but that of Balt Walters shall be lifted against him!" Whirling his bloody hatchet high above his head, he yelled hoarsely: "Now, murdering dog, the Scourge of your race stands before you!"

Like two famished tigers they sprung at each other. It would be impossible for words to describe the marvellous dexterity displayed by each. Knowing that more than life depended upon the issue of the combat, Mad Buffalo brought all his savage power and skill in play, to vanquish his antagonist. But, he had met his superior, in every respect. Finding that he was baffled at every point, his rage knew no bounds. Whirling his tomahawk several times around his head, he flung it at the head of Walters, who bent his body and let the weapon fly harmlessly past, and before the Dacotah chief could draw his knife his right arm was grasped with a grip of steel.

"Amy Lee, you are avenged!" screamed Walters, in a voice almost unearthly. One moment and the weapon of the avenger was poised in the air; the next, Mad Buffalo lay at his feet, a writhing mass of flesh, working in the agonies of death.

The wildest shouts of triumph announced the death of the Dacotah chief. The Pawnees were almost frantic with delight.

On the gigantic Assiniboin chief devolved the task of continuing the battle. As soon as he saw Mad Buffalo fall, he shouted for his warriors to follow him, to avenge his death.

There was one who had kept his eye on his movements,

and that was Wild Antelope, who shouted his battle-cry and spring to meet the giant. While yet several yards apart, the Pawnee chief took his knife and held it only by the very point. By a sudden jerk it flew from his hand like lightning, and was transixed in the heart of the Assiniboin chief. A wild and frenzied frown for a moment settled on his countenance; then pouring forth the battle-cry of his nation, he fell dead. Before his panic-stricken warriors could lift a hand, his scalp was in the possession of the victorious Wild Antelope!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SILVER WHISTLE.

THE Pawnees and trappers made the welkin ring with their shouts at the bold deed of the young Pawnee chief.

A sudden panic seized the Sioux. Their two chiefs being slain, they fled in every direction, hotly pursued by the victorious Pawnees.

After some time the Pawnees returned, loaded down with the trophies they had taken. Every horse belonging to the Dakotas fell into their hands. What made the victory more complete was, that not a warrior of any note was lost on the side of the Pawnees.

While divesting the body of the Assiniboin chief of the numerous ornaments that adorned his person, Casteronix discovered, in the pouch of the dead chief, a silver whistle of curious workmanship. As the half-breed held up the prize to view, a startling cry escaped from the lips of Balt Walters, who was standing close by at the time.

"Good heavens, where did the Assiniboin come by this?" he almost shrieked, snatching the whistle from the hand of Casteronix.

"Have you seen it afore, Balt?" inquired Bonte, with unfeigned surprise.

"Have I seen it afore? What a question to ask! Why,

man, it belonged to old Dan Lee, the hunter. Just look, perhaps the imp may have the chain belonging to it about him."

"I guess ye may spare yerself the trouble," said Casteronix, "for if I'm not very much mistaken the chain is around the neck of Aleulia, the Assinibon queen."

"Around the neck of Aleulia?" shouted Balt and Bonte together.

"Then, if Val is right, ye may shoot me if Aleulia is not yer long lost daughter," said Bonte, emphatically. "It's not the first time. I've heard the boys speak about the likeness between Wild Antelope and Aleulia."

"My daughter Amy alive!" said Walters, with the deepest emotion. "That's a happiness I never dreamed of. Oh, God, if it should only turn out to be true!"

"Is it not as likely that the queen of the Assinibons is yer daughter, as it war for yer boy to be the chief of the Pawnees?"

A few moments later, and the whole party set out on their return to their own camp.

The hopes that had been raised in the heart of Balt Walters were more than verified. Casteronix was right: the chain was around the neck of Aleulia. From her own account and recollections of her younger days, the evidence could but satisfy the most skeptical that she was indeed the abducted daughter of Balt Walters.

Nothing but feasting and rejoicing reigned for over two days in camp. The cup of happiness was full to overflowing for Balt Walters. He did not know which to admire most, Aleulia or Wild Antelope. He seemed altogether to be a new being. On the third day they started for the villages of the Pawnee Loups, on the banks of the river that derived its name from that tribe. Messengers had been sent on ahead to notify their people of their victory over the Dakotahs. Never was there such rejoicing and dancing in the villages of the Pawnee Loups.

Reader, our story is at its closing scene. About a year after the events we have recorded, Jerome Allen and his brigade of trappers made another trip out to the trapping-grounds. In their company was a missionary, on his way to his field of labor among the Pawnees. Shortly after their arrival, Jerome

Allen was married to Alealia, or Amy Walters. The gospel messenger performed the same kind office for her brother and Starlight, the daughter of Santalanta, whom he once regarded as his sister.

As for the rest of the characters who have figured in our tale, the most of them lived and died in the service of Jerome Allen, who succeeded to his father's business.

But Walters lived to see his grandchildren grow up about him. Often and often he could be seen caressing a noble horse who would follow him about with the docility of a child. It was Fleetfoot, the noble steed that bore him hundreds of miles over mountain and prairie when, as the Nameless Hunter, he followed the trail of the Dakotahs. The hardy horse seemed to live on to an unusual age, to receive the love of his old master.

THE END.

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